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# ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE

By ANDRÉ MAUROIS

ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE

ASPECTS OF BIOGRAPHY

A VOYAGE TO THE ISLAND OF THE ARTICOLES

DISRAELI: A PICTURE OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

BERNARD QUESNAY

ARIEL: THE LIFE OF SHELLEY

CAPTAINS AND KINGS

MAPE: THE WORLD OF ILLUSION

# ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE

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1929

ANDRÉ MAUROIS

*Translated by Joseph Collins*

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*To*

SIMONE

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*We always seek the eternal everywhere save here; we always turn our mind's eye toward something beyond the present moment and the present reality; or else we await death, as though each instant were not death and rebirth. Each instant offers a new life to us. To-day, now, this moment . . . is all we can seize.*

ALAIN

# PART I

## ODILE

## *Philippe Marcenat to Isabelle de Cheverny*

I.

My abrupt departure must have astonished you. I apologize but I am not sorry. I wish I could yield to the emotional flood which, in the forest two days ago, carried me like a torrent toward your snow-white gown! But I am afraid of love, Isabelle, and I am afraid of myself. I do not know what Renée or any one else may have told you of my life. You and I have spoken of it, at times, but I have never told you the whole truth. One of the charms of new acquaintances is that they give us opportunity to paint a past, which we wish might have been happier, in such lively colors that the drabness of reality is forgotten. But our friendship has gone beyond the stage of flattering confidences. Man reveals his soul as woman reveals her body, in successive but well-guarded stages. One after another I have dropped my most secret reserves. And now, my real memories, driven from their retreat, are about to surrender in the full light of day.

I am far away from you, in the very room in which I spent my childhood. On the wall is a shelf laden with books which for more than twenty years mother

has kept "for the eldest of my grandsons." Shall I have sons? That big one, with the red back, spotted with ink, is my old Greek dictionary, and those with the gilt and red bindings are the prizes I received at school. I should love to tell you everything, Isabelle, to reveal to you first the affectionate little boy, then the cynical youth, and finally the man, wounded and unhappy. I should love to tell you all—candidly, accurately, humbly. Perhaps, if I write it, I shall not have the heart to send it to you. Never mind. Were it only for myself, it would not be without service to render a balance sheet of my life.

Do you remember that evening, on our way back from Saint Germain, when I described Gandumas to you? It is a beautiful country, even though desolate. A stream flows beside the factory buildings which are centered in the hollow of a wild, deep glen. Our house, a little château dating from the sixteenth century, of which there are many in the Limousin region, overlooks a briar heath. Early in youth, I felt much pride in the thought that I was a Marcenat and that our family reigned over the district. My father had transformed the small paper mill, which had been only a laboratory for my grandfather, into a vast plant. He had bought the adjoining farms and had made a model estate of the wilderness of Gandumas. During my childhood new buildings were always being erected, and each year the huge shed for the paper pulp by the side of the stream became longer and larger.

My mother's family hailed from the Limousin. My great-grandfather, a barrister, had bought Gandumas when it was sold by the Government. My father, an engineer from Lorraine, had lived in our province only from the time of his marriage. When he came he brought with him one of his brothers, my Uncle Pierre, who settled in a neighboring village, Chardeuil. On Sundays, when the weather was fine, the two families used to meet at the ponds of Saint-Yrieix. We went by carriage. I sat on a narrow bracket-seat, facing my parents. The rhythmic trot of the horse frequently put me to sleep. Sometimes, in an effort to divert my thoughts, I followed his shadow on the walls of the houses, or on the banks of the road, and I watched it diminish, pass and finally, at a turn of the road, fall behind us. From time to time a smell of manure which, with the sound of church bells remains associated in my mind with the idea of Sunday, would envelop us like a cloud, and big flies would come hovering around me. I loathed the hills more than anything else, because then the horse walked slowly, the carriage climbed with painful effort, and the old coachman, Thomasson, smacked his tongue and cracked his whip.

My Uncle Pierre, his wife and their only daughter, my cousin Renée, waited for us at the inn. Mother gave us slices of bread and butter, and father said, "Children, go and play." So, Renée and I walked under the trees by the pond and gathered pine cones and chestnut burrs. Returning home Renée often ac-

companied us, the coachman having arranged a place for her on the little seat of our carriage. During the journey my parents never spoke.

Conversation was difficult, because of the extreme sensitiveness of my father who seemed to suffer whenever any sentiment was expressed in public. For instance, at table, if mother said a word about our education, discussed the factory, or mentioned our uncle or aunt who lived in Paris, father would nervously remind her, by a discreet gesture, that the servants were changing the plates. Then she would become silent. While I was still very young I had observed that if my father or uncle had occasion to reproach one another, they would always entrust their wives with the mission and take particular precautions about it. From my earliest days, I realized that my father was exceedingly self-contained. With us, the sincerity of conventional sentiments was never questioned—parents loved their children, children their parents, husbands their wives. The Marcenats wished to see the world as an Eden on earth, and in this, it seems to me, there was more innocence than hypocrisy.

2.

Again, I see the sunny meadow of Gandumas. Below, in the valley, lies the village of Chardeuil, veiled by shimmering mist, the effect of the heat. A little boy, buried to the waist in a hole which he has dug near

a sand pile, alone in the immense landscape which surrounds him, is on the lookout for an invisible enemy. My favorite book at that time was Danrit's *Fort Defense in War*. In that hole, I was Private Mitour defending the fort of Liouville which was commanded by an old colonel for whose sake I would gladly have laid down my life. I apologize for recording these infantile memories, but I find in them the first display of one of the most dominant traits of my make-up: a passionate need, which I have always felt, to devote myself wholeheartedly to one ideal, though in later life the object of my devotion was entirely different. When I analyze the earliest manifestation of this characteristic which, though scarcely perceptible, is still alive in my memory, I can even trace to that remote time a touch of sensuousness in this craving for personal sacrifice.

Very soon, however, I played another game. I had received, for New Year, a book entitled *Little Russian Soldiers*. It told of a number of schoolboys who had decided to form an army and had chosen a girl student for queen. Her name was Ania Sokoloff. "She was a young girl, strikingly beautiful, slender, handsome and clever." I thrilled at the oath the soldiers took to their queen, at the tasks they accomplished to please her, at the smile which was their reward. I do not know why this tale was so attractive to me, but I loved it and certainly I owe to it the ideal of woman I have so frequently depicted to you. I can see myself walking by her side through the greenswards of Gandumas, while

in a deep voice she tells me sad and beautiful things. I do not recall just when I began to call her the "Amazone," but I know there was always an idea of daring and courage in my conception of her. I also liked to read, with mother, the stories of Lancelot and of Don Quixote. I could not believe that Dulcinea was ugly, and I tore from my book the picture of her, that I might be free to imagine her as I wished her to be.

Although my cousin Renée was two years my junior, she was my schoolmate for a long time. When I was thirteen, father sent me to the High School at Limoges. I boarded with a cousin of ours and went home only on Sundays. I liked school. From my father, I inherited a taste for study and for reading. I was considered a fair student. The pride and timidity of the Marcenats surged in me, as inevitably as their bright eyes and their arched eyebrows were part of my physical make-up. The only antidote to my pride was the image of the queen to which I remained loyal. At night, before going to sleep, I used to tell stories to myself, in which my "Amazone" was the heroine. She had a name, now: Hélène, for I had fallen in love with Homer's Hélène, my teacher in the second grade being responsible for this.

Why do some images remain as clear to us as they were the day we first saw them, while others, apparently more significant, fade and disappear so quickly? Just now, I see Monsieur Bailly entering the classroom, with his habitual slow stride, the day we had to write

an essay; he hangs his cloak on a peg and says, "I have found a beautiful topic for you, 'Stésichore's Recantation. . . .'" Yes, I can see Monsieur Bailly clearly. He has a heavy mustache, wears his hair pompadour, and his face shows the impress of passions, probably unhappy ones. He takes a paper from his briefcase and dictates, "Stésichore, the poet, had allowed his curse to fall upon Hélène in his verses, as punishment for the evils which befell the Greeks, through her sins; Venus strikes him blind; conscious of his sin, he composes a song for her in which he expresses his sorrow for having blasphemed against her beauty."

How I should love to read again the eight pages I wrote that morning! Never since have I found such complete communion between profound living and the written word; never, save perhaps in a few letters to Odile and, scarcely a week ago, in a letter which I wrote to you but did not send. That theme of sacrifice to beauty stirred such poignant emotions in me that, despite my callow youth, I was frightened, and for two hours I worked with almost painful zeal, as though I foresaw that I, too, would have cause to write, during my lifetime, the palinode of Stésichore.

But I would be giving you a very distorted image of the life of a fifteen-year-old schoolboy were I to tell you that my exaltation was purely an inward one. The ideas I exchanged with my schoolmates on woman and love were cynical. Some of my friends told of their experiences with technical and brutal detail. As for

myself, I had found a reincarnation of my Hélène in a young woman of Limoges, a friend of the cousin at whose house I boarded. Her name was Denise Aubry; she was pretty and had a reputation for promiscuity. When any one gossiped about her in my presence, I thought of Don Quixote and of Lancelot, and I wanted to thrust a lance at her slanderers. Every time she came to dinner, I was half insane with joy and fear. I hated her husband, a harmless and kind-hearted manufacturer of chinaware. I always hoped to meet her in the street on my way home from school. I had noticed that frequently, toward noon, she went to buy pastry or flowers near the cathedral—and I managed to be between the florist and the bakery shops at that hour. Several times she permitted me to walk with her to her door, my student satchel under my arm.

When summer came, I saw her more conveniently on the tennis court. One evening, the weather being perfect, several young couples decided to dine there. Madame Aubry, who knew quite well that I loved her, asked me to remain. The dinner was a jolly affair. Night fell. I was lying on the grass, at her feet; my hand encountered her ankle; I grasped it tenderly and she did not object. I can still smell the heavy fragrance of the syringa bush behind us. We could see stars through the branches. It was a moment of perfect happiness.

When it was quite dark, I sensed approaching Denise, a young lawyer of twenty-seven, famous in Limoges

for his wit, and I overheard their conversation though it was whispered. He was asking her to meet him in Paris, at an address which he gave her; she said, softly, "Keep still," but I knew she would go. I did not loosen my hold on her ankle, and she abandoned it to me, happy, indifferent; but I was hurt and, suddenly, I felt a profound contempt for women.

I have on my table, at this moment, the little school-book in which I kept notes of the books I read. I see there, under the date of the twenty-sixth of June, an initial "D" and a circle around it. Below I had copied a sentence of Barrès: "We must not set too high valuation on women, though we are thrilled by their beauty and proud that we can garner so much delight from such insignificant creatures."

All that summer I flirted with young girls. I learned that dark alleys are propitious for clasping their waists, for kissing them, fondling them. The Denise Aubry episode seemed to have cured me of my romantic attitude. I led deliberately what I considered a dissolute life, and the ease with which I succeeded filled me with pride and with despair.

3.

The following year my father, who for a long time had been counsellor general, was elected senator of the Haute-Vienne. Our mode of life changed. I studied philosophy at one of the lycées of Paris. Gandumas

was now only a summer home for us. It was understood that I should study law, but that I should complete my military service before embarking upon a professional career.

During the holidays, I again saw Madame Aubry, who came to Gandumas with my Limoges cousins. I think it was she who asked them to bring her to our house. I offered to show her the park, and I had great pleasure in leading her to a pavilion that I called my observatory and in which, from the time when I had first loved her, I had often passed entire Sundays in vague revery. She admired the deep, wooded gorge at the bottom of which there were stones covered with moss, splashed with light foam from the water of the factory. When she stood up and leaned over in order to observe the factory workers, I put my hand on her shoulder; she smiled. I attempted to kiss her. She pushed me away gently, but without determination. I then told her that I was returning to Paris in October and that I should have a little apartment on the left bank, and that she would be expected. "I don't know," she said. "It is very difficult."

In my diary of the winter 1906-1907, I find a number of rendezvous under the letter D. Denise Aubry disappointed me. I was wrong. She was an amiable woman, but I wanted, and I don't know why, to find in her a person sympathetic with my studies and one who would be my mistress. She came to Paris to see me and to try on clothes and hats. This rather

disgusted me. I lived in books and I could not understand how she could be different from me. She asked me to lend her Gide, Barrès and Claudel of whom I had frequently spoken, but what she said to me afterwards wounded me. She had a beautiful figure, and I was consumed with desire for her from the time she came back from Limoges. After I had passed two hours with her, I wanted to die, to escape, or to talk with a man friend.

My favorite comrades were André Halff, an intelligent young Jew, a somewhat testy person whom I had met at the law school, and Bertrand de Jussac, one of my Limoges chums who had entered Saint-Cyr and who was in the habit of spending Sunday with us in Paris. When I was with Halff or Bertrand, I felt that I was plunged into a sea of profoundest sincerity. On the surface was the Philippe of my parents, a simple person, indulging in some Marcenat conventions and some feeble resistances; then came the Philippe of Denise Aubry, alternately sensual and tender, then brutal; then the Philippe of Bertrand, courageous, sentimental; then the Philippe of Halff, precise and hard. And I knew well that beneath them all, there was still another Philippe, much more the real Philippe than any of the others, and this one alone could make me happy, if I could angle him or bring him to the surface, but I did not even seek to know him.

Have I spoken to you of the room I rented in a little house, in the rue de Varennes, which was furnished in

the cold and severe taste which I affected at that time? On the walls hung masks of Pascal and of Beethoven—strange onlookers of my adventures. The divan which served as bed was covered with gray burlap. On the mantel were a Spinoza, a Montaigne and some scientific treatises. Was all this done to impress others, or was it the expression of a sincere love of ideas? It was, it seems to me, a combination of the two sentiments. I was at once studious and inhuman.

Denise often said to me that my room frightened her, but that she loved it just the same. She had had many lovers before me and she had always dominated them. She was deeply attached to me. I say this to you with much humility. Life teaches us all that in love modesty is easy; the most unfavored sometimes please; the most attractive fail. If I say to you that Denise loved me more than I loved her, I shall tell you with the same frankness the most important episodes of my life in which the situation was reversed. During the period of which I am speaking, between my twentieth and twenty-third years, I was loved, but I loved very little. To tell you the truth, I had no idea what love was. The idea that it could make one suffer seemed to me incredibly romantic. Poor Denise! I can see her stretched on the divan, leaning over me, interrogating with anxiety this forehead of mine which was a closed book for her.

"Love?" I said to her. "What is this thing 'love'?"

"Don't you know what it is? Well, you will know, you too one day will be caught."

I remarked the word "caught" because I found it vulgar. Denise's vocabulary displeased me. I resented the fact that she did not speak like Juliet or Clelia Conti. Face to face with her soul, I made the gesture of impatience that one makes before a coat badly cut. I pulled it down in front, then in back, trying to make it fit. Much later, I learned that at Limoges she had passed for an intelligent person, and as the result of my effort she had made a conquest of one of the most discriminating men of that province. The minds of women gradually become steeped with the sediments which remain from the successive influences of the men they have loved, in the same way as the tastes of men preserve the confused and superimposed images of women who have crossed their lives. Often the atrocious suffering that we experience at the hands of a woman becomes the source of the love which we inspire in another and the cause of her misery.

M. stood for Mary Graham, a little English girl with eyes veiled in mystery, whom I had met at my Aunt Cora's. I must tell you about Aunt Cora because she plays a rôle in my history which, though intermittent, is not without importance. She was my mother's sister; she had married a banker, Baron Choin, and she had always had, I don't know why, an ambition to surround herself with the greatest possible number of bankers, ambassadors and generals. She got

her start by being the mistress of a well-known statesman; she deserved her victory for she exploited her success with methodical and admirable perseverance. She was at home, avenue Marceau, every evening after six, and each Tuesday evening she gave a dinner of twenty-four covers. These dinners at Aunt Cora's were one of the few standing jokes of our Limousin family. My father always said, and I think he was right, that she never let anything interfere with them. In summer, the dinners were transferred to her villa at Trouville. My mother used to relate that when she heard my uncle was dying (he had cancer of the stomach) she immediately went to Paris to help her sister and, arriving on a Tuesday evening, she found Cora at the head of her table, surrounded by her guests.

"What about Adrian?" my mother asked.

"Oh, he is all right," said Aunt Cora, "as well as can be expected, only he is not well enough to come to dinner."

The next morning at seven a servant telephoned to my mother, "The Baroness regrets to inform Madame Marcenat that the Baron died suddenly during the night."

When I arrived in Paris, I had no desire to see my aunt, for I had been brought up by my father to have a profound horror of society. When I learned to know her, however, she was not at all unattractive to me. She was a very good woman who loved to help people, and who had acquired by contact with many men of different

temperaments a vast knowledge, a little confused, but nevertheless real, of the social mechanism. For me, an inquisitive young provincial, she was a mine of information. She saw that I found it pleasant to listen to her and she received me into the fold of her friendship. I was invited to avenue Marceau every Tuesday evening. Perhaps she put a little more coquetry into my welcome, knowing that my father and mother were hostile to her salon, and she triumphed over them by making me an habitué there, in annexing me, as it were. Aunt Cora's entourage was made up of a certain number of young women, indispensable bait. I undertook the conquest of many of them. I made love to them without loving them, as a matter of pride, and in order to prove to myself that victory was possible. I remember the perfect indifference with which, when one of them had just left my apartment, smiling at me tenderly, I sat in an armchair, took a book and without effort drove her image from my mind.

Do not judge me severely. I believe that many young men who, like me, have not had the good fortune of finding, early, a very remarkable mistress or wife, are almost inevitably led to this haughty egotism. They are in search of a system. Women know, instinctively, the vanity of such a search and by sheer condescension they pretend to fall in with it. For a while, desire helps the delusion but soon an invincible boredom thrusts itself between their fundamentally hostile souls. Was I still thinking of my Greek Hélène? I had sub-

merged that passion, like an altar buried under the cheerless weight of my cold strategy.

Sometimes, at the concerts which I attended on Sundays, I would see among the audience a delightful profile which recalled to me, abruptly and vividly, the blonde and slavic queen of my childhood, and the chestnut trees of Gandumas. Then, during the whole concert, I would offer to this unknown face the powerful emotions which music engendered in me, and for a moment it would seem to me that if I could only know this woman, I would find in her the perfect, almost divine, human being to whom I wished to devote my life. Then the throneless queen would be lost in the crowd while I went back to rue de Varennes, to meet a mistress whom I did not love.

I cannot understand to-day how I ever could contain within myself two personalities so entirely opposed. They lived on two different planes and never met. The tender, devoted lover realized that the beloved woman was a myth in real life. Loath to allow her vague and adorable image to be contaminated by the reality of ordinary women, he found refuge in books. The cynical young man, on the other hand, dined at Aunt Cora's, and if his table neighbor happened to be attractive, he showed himself gay, bold and daring.

After I had completed my military service, father suggested that I should help him in the management of the factory. He had moved his offices to Paris, where his best customers were—newspaper and book

publishers. I took a keen interest in the business and was constantly enlarging it, at the same time continuing my education by attending lectures and much reading. In the winter, I went to Gandumas once a month; in the summer, my family stayed there and I spent several weeks with them. It was always with pleasure that I found again, in the Limousin, the lonely walks of my childhood. When I was not at the mill, I worked either in my bedroom which had not been changed, or in my observatory overlooking the Loue glen; every hour I would get up, walk briskly to the end of the old chestnut-tree alley and then, with equal briskness, back to my work.

I was indeed happy to be away for a while from young women who, in Paris, spread over my life, a thin but none the less real net of appointments, complaints, gossip. This Mary Graham of whom I have spoken to you was the wife of a man I knew well; I did not like to shake hands with him. Most of my friends, I think, would have done so with a sort of mocking vanity. But on these points the tradition of my family was strict. Father's marriage had been dictated by sensible motives; and as happens not infrequently, love followed in its wake. In his own silent and cheerless way he had been happy; he had never had any love affairs, at least not after he married; and yet, I sensed that there was romance in his soul and I felt, too, though confusedly, that should I have the good fortune to meet a woman

somewhat like the "Amazone" of my dreams, I could be happy and faithful.

4.

During the winter of 1909, I had two successive attacks of bronchitis and when March came our doctor advised that I be sent south for a few weeks. I thought it would be more interesting to go to Italy where I had never been. So I stopped at the Italian lakes first, then went to Venice, and spent the last week of my holiday in Florence. The first evening at dinner in the hotel I noticed at an adjoining table a young girl of ethereal beauty, angelic almost; I could not keep my eyes away from her. She was accompanied by her mother, still young looking, and by a man of indefinite age. When they left the table, I asked the *maître d'hôtel* who my neighbors were. He said they were French, a Madame and Mademoiselle Malet; their companion, an Italian general, did not live in the hotel. The next day, at lunch, their table was vacant.

I had letters of introduction to many Florentines, among them to Professor Angelo Guardi, the art critic whose publisher was one of our customers. I sent it to him and received an invitation to tea at his house the same day. There, in the garden of a Fiesole villa, I saw, among some twenty guests, my table neighbors of the hotel. Under a wide straw hat and in a peach-colored frock with a blue collar, the girl looked quite as

beautiful to me as she had the evening before. I felt a strange timidity overcoming me and, turning away from her group, I went to speak with Guardi. We were standing by a rose-covered pergola.

"I planned the garden myself," Guardi said to me. "Ten years ago all this land you now see was a meadow. Down there . . ."

And following the wave of his hand, my eyes encountered those of Mademoiselle Malet. I was astonished and happy to see they were fixed on mine. It was a brief though infinite glance; like the millet seed, it was laden with potentiality. My profound love had its birth in it. Thus I knew, though no words had been spoken, that it was permitted me to follow my inclination, and as soon as decently possible I approached her.

"What a beautiful garden this is!"

"Yes," she replied, "and what I like so much in Florence is that one sees mountains and trees everywhere. I hate cities that are cities and nothing else."

"Guardi tells me the view is beautiful from the back of the house."

"Let us go and see," she said cheerfully.

We found ourselves confronted with a dense row of cypress trees, through the center of which a flight of stone steps led to a grotto with a statue. Farther to the left was a terrace from which there was a beautiful view of Florence.

Mademoiselle Malet, near me, leaning upon her

elbows, looked for a long time, gazing at the red cupolas and the large sloping roofs of the houses, and at the blue mountains in the distance. After some minutes of silence she said,

"How I love it!"

And as she spoke, she threw her graceful, youthful head backward as though in an effort to drink in the countryside.

From this first conversation, Odile Malet treated me as an old friend. She told me that her father was an architect, that she admired him very much and that he had remained in Paris. She was chagrined to see the Italian general playing the bodyguard to her mother. I told her of my "Amazone," of the impossibility of finding any joy in life unless I were absorbed by a violent and profound passion. (My systematized cynicism had been instantly swept away by her presence.) She told me that one day when she was about thirteen, her best friend who was called Misa had said to her, "If I should ask you to do it, would you throw yourself from that window?" and she had nearly thrown herself from the fourth story. This episode delighted me.

I said to her, "Do you visit the churches and galleries frequently?"

"Yes," she said, "but what I particularly like to do is to roam around the old streets. Only I hate to walk with mother and her general, so every morning I get up very early. . . . Would you like to go with me

to-morrow morning? I shall be in the lobby of the hotel at nine o'clock. . . ."

"Rather! Ought I get your mother's permission to go out with you?"

"No, leave it to me. I'll arrange it."

The next morning, I was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs and we went out together. The large flagstones of the quay glistened in the sun. In the distance, a church bell sounded. The horses' hoofs echoed in the streets. Suddenly, life became very simple. The ideal happiness for me would be to have this blonde head always near me, to take her arm in crossing the streets and to feel, were it only for an instant, the warmth of her young body. She led me to the via Tornabuoni. She loved shoe-shops, flower-shops, book-shops. On the Ponte Vecchio, we stopped and stood a long time before the shops with their strings of pink and black beads.

"It is amusing, don't you think. . . ."

She had some of the tastes that I had formerly condemned in poor Denise Aubry.

What did we talk about? I don't remember now very distinctly, but in my notebook I find this entry:

*Walked with O. to San Lorenzo. She told me of the big light that used to strike just above her bed in the convent and which was reflected from a shutter illumined by an outside lamp. Falling asleep, she would see it grow larger and larger and she would imagine*

*herself in Paradise. She speaks of the "Pink Library" series and detests its heroines, Camille and Madeleine. She hates to play the rôle of Goody-goody girl. Fairy stories and poetry are her favorite reading. She dreams sometimes that she is walking under the sea and around her float the skeletons of fishes; in other dreams a weasel drags her under the earth. She loves danger; when she rides horseback, she takes the stiffest jumps. A bewitching expression comes into her eyes when she tries to understand something. She frowns slightly, and looks ahead as if she did not see quite clearly, and then she says "yes" as if to herself: she has understood.*

I realize that in copying this entry for you I am powerless to convey the happy memories it evokes in me. Why attempt to reproduce such perfection of sentiment? Was anything Odile said remarkable? I do not think so, but she had what every Marcenat lacked: zest for life. We love human beings because they emit a mysterious essence which, were it in our own make-up, would make us whole.

Though I had known women more beautiful than Odile, more brilliant, more intelligent, none of them had thrown open the doors of the world to me as she had done. Surfeited by too much reading, by too much solitary meditation, blind to the concrete beauty of trees, of flowers, of the smell of earth, to the loveliness of skies and the freshness of air, I found them all gathered for me every morning by Odile, and laid at my feet.

Formerly, when alone in a city, I would spend the days in museums or in my room reading books on Venice, on Rome. One might have said that the outer world reached me only through masterpieces. Odile at once led me into a world of color and of sound. She took me to the flower market under the high arch of the Mercato Nuovo. She wandered among the women who bought a spray of lily-of-the-valley, a twig of lilac. She loved the old country priest who bargained for a clump of laburnum wrapped around a long reed. On the little hills above San Miniato she pointed out to me the narrow streets flanked by hot walls covered with graceful clumps of wisteria.

Did I bore her when I described to her, with the Marcenat seriousness, the strifes of Guelph and Ghibelline, the life of Dante, or the economic situation of Italy? I think not. Some one has said that when a woman says something infantile, stupid even, a man has an uncontrollable desire to kiss the childish mouth that uttered it, while women feel their deepest love when man is serious, coldly logical. Perhaps this was true of Odile and myself. Be that as it may, I know that when she murmured in a pleading tone, "let us stop" before a shop of spurious jewelry, I neither criticized nor complained. All I thought was, "How I love her!" and I realized with heightened certitude the urge of the knight-errant, the devotion unto death which had been linked up in me since childhood with the idea of love.

This theme pervaded me and gathered impetus and volume. Like a lone flute in an orchestra rendering a short measure which seems to awaken first the violins, then the cellos, and then the horns, until finally an overwhelming flood of rhythm ensues, so the gathered flowers, the perfume of the lily-of-the-valley, the black and white churches, the Botticellis and the Michelangelos united to shout the joy that attended loving Odile, to testify the good fortune vouchsafed me to protect her perfect and delicate beauty from an invisible enemy.

On the evening of my arrival in Florence I should have considered it an inestimable privilege to take a walk of two hours with the delectable stranger. A few days later I regarded it intolerable slavery to have to go back to the hotel for meals. Madame Malet, uneasy, knowing nothing about me, wished to retard our courtship, but you know what young people in the throes of love are. The dynamic force they engender seems irresistible. Everywhere we were met by waves of sympathy. The beauty of Odile would have sufficed, but she told me that the two of us together impressed these simple Italian people more than she alone. The cab drivers thought we were lovers. The guards in the museums smiled at us and the boatmen on the Arno looked at us kindly when, standing on the parapet, we leaned on our elbows, close enough to feel the warmth of one another's body.

I had telegraphed my father that I hoped he would

be able to extend my holiday one or two weeks. He consented. I could have Odile to myself all day now. I hired a motor, and we took long rides into the Tuscan country. On the road to Siena, we felt as though we were going through a Carpaccio landscape. The car went briskly up the little hills that looked like sand piles made by children, with the unreal, crenelated little villages on the top. We thrilled at the heavy shadows of Siena. Lunching with Odile in a darkened, cool hotel, I realized that I could live all my life face to face with her. On the way home, her hand stole into mine and that same evening I wrote in my diary:

*Evident sympathy for us on the part of chauffeurs, chambermaids and peasants. Doubtless they see that we love one another. The artfulness of the people of this little hotel is amazing. The exquisite thing is that when I am with her, I despise everything that is not of her, as she despises everything that is not of me. An enraptured expression comes over her face, which bespeaks pleasure and confidence. There enters some sadness into it, too, as though she would keep the present moment forever.*

Ah! What a love I have retained for the Odile of those Florentine weeks. She was so beautiful that, at times, I doubted that she was real. I would turn my head away and say to her, "I am going to remain five minutes without looking at you." But I never could

endure it more than thirty seconds. There was a touch of poetry in everything she said. Although she was very cheerful, from time to time a grave note, like that of a cello, would come into her voice, a discordant melancholy which suddenly filled the air with a confused and tragic threat. What was this phrase that she repeated then? "Fatally condemned" . . . wait . . . yes . . . "under the influence of Mars, fatally condemned, girl of the golden hair, look out for yourself. . . ." In what sentimental novel had she read that, in what melodrama had she heard it? I do not know. When one evening, at dusk, in an inviting and propitious grove of olive trees she yielded her lips to me for the first time, she looked at me tenderly, yet withal sadly and said, "You recall, dearest, the words of Juliet . . . 'Perhaps I have been too tender and therefore thou mayst think my 'havior light'."

I recall our love of those days with pleasure. It was beautiful and as profound in Odile as in myself. But, in her, passion was always checked by pride.

She explained to me later that at first the convent, and then the life she led with her mother whom she did not admire, had made her "shut in." When the banked fire blazed, the flames though brief were violent, and they warmed my heart the more because of their spontaneity.

Just as certain fashions of clothes, by hiding the entire bodies of women from the eyes of men, made it thrilling, formerly, merely to touch their garments, so

modesty of sentiment, by concealing the usual manifestations of passion reveals the worth and charm of delicate shadings of words.

Finally, father summoned me back to Paris by telegram. He was evidently annoyed that I had tarried. That day I went to the Guardis where Odile had preceded me, and in her presence I had to announce my departure. The other guests were quite insensitive to the news and went on with their conversation about Germany and Morocco. As we left the house I said to Odile,

"Quite interesting what Guardi said . . ."

She replied, nearly heartbroken, "I heard only one thing: that you were going away."

5.

Before I left Florence, I was betrothed to Odile. I had to break the news to my family and that caused not a little concern. The Marcenats looked upon marriage as a clan affair. My uncle would at once get busy and make inquiries about the Malets. What would he learn? I knew nothing about the family and had never even seen Odile's father. I have always told you that when the Marcenats had any serious news to convey they never did it personally, but always through some intermediary and with the utmost care. I begged Aunt Cora, who was my favorite confidante, to tell my father of my engagement. It was always most gratifying to

her to have the soundness of her information established even though the source and its subject were often quite disparate. For instance, if one asked her for some details on the life of a corporal, Aunt Cora had recourse only to the Minister of War, or if the inquiry concerned a general practitioner of Limoges, one of Paris' leading surgeons would be her prospective informant. When I mentioned Monsieur Malet's name, she replied, as I thought she would,

"I don't know him, but if he is anybody, I can soon find out through my old friend Berteaux, you know, the architect who is a member of the Academy, and whom I invite to dinner twice each winter. Poor Adrian used to shoot with him."

When I saw her a few days later, she was gloomy though voluble:

"Oh, my poor boy. I am so glad you talked to me. You can't possibly marry her. . . . I have seen dear Berteaux and he knows Malet well. They competed for the Prix de Rome the same year. He says he is an attractive man, with some talent, but a failure just the same because he has never done anything. He is the kind of architect who can design a building or a monument, but takes no interest in the actual work, and so he loses all his clients. . . . I know the kind, after building a house at Trouville. . . . Malet married a woman I used to know when she was Madame Boehmer. I remembered her the moment Berteaux mentioned Hortense Boehmer—don't I remember her!

—He is her third husband. I hear that you are right about the daughter being lovely and most attractive; no wonder you are crazy about her . . . but just the same she is not the girl for you. Don't marry her, Philippe my dear, and don't mention her to your father or to your mother. It does not matter about me (I have seen so many people in my life) but your poor mother . . . I can't see her with Hortense Boehmer . . . mercy, no."

I told my aunt that not only was Odile quite unlike her family, but that my mind was made up and that the sooner the family approved of it, the better. After some hesitation, Aunt Cora consented to talk to my parents, partly because she was kind-hearted, but mostly because she was like those old diplomats who have an irresistible urge for negotiation and who, when they see international difficulties looming ahead, experience at once fear because they love peace, and pleasure because it gives them opportunity to display their only talent.

My father was quiet and indulgent. He asked me to reflect before deciding. At first, my mother joyously welcomed the idea of marriage for me, but when she was told a few days later by an old friend who knew the Malets that they moved in a "fast" set, she saw the matter in a different light. Madame Malet's reputation was not of the best. It was said she still had lovers. About Odile there was nothing really disparaging to say, save that she had been abominably brought

up, that she was free to go out with young men and that she was, in any case, far too pretty.

"Have they any money?" my Uncle Pierre asked, for he of course was present at the conference.

"I don't know," mother replied. "They say that Monsieur Malet is a clever though queer sort of man. They are not people for us."

"They are not people for us" was a typical Marcenat expression and it was a terrible condemnation. For a few weeks I felt that I would have great difficulty in making my marriage acceptable to them. Odile and her mother returned to Paris a fortnight after I did. I called on them. They lived on the third floor of a house on the rue Lafayette. Through a door camouflaged as a panel, Odile led me to her father's office. I was accustomed to the strict neatness that my father exacted from his employees at Gandumas as well as in the rue Valois in Paris. When I saw those three rooms, poorly lighted, the worn and torn green filing boxes and the sixty-year-old draftsman, I realized that the person who had told my aunt that Monsieur Malet was an architect without a job was well informed. Odile's father was chatty and lively. A bit too cordial in his welcome, he talked of Florence and of Odile with a touch of sentimentality. Then he showed me some sketches of villas which he "hoped" to build in Biarritz.

"What I should very much like to do would be to build a large, modern hotel in the Basque style. I sub-

mitted a plan to Hendaye, but I did not get the commission."

As I listened to him, I visualized in fear and trembling the sort of impression he would make upon my family.

Madame Malet asked me to come to dinner the following evening. When I arrived at eight, I found Odile alone with her brothers, Monsieur Malet was in his office, reading; Madame Malet had not yet come in. The two boys looked like Odile and yet, from the first moment, I knew we would never be close friends. They tried to be friendly, brotherly even, but several times during the evening I saw them wink at one another and their faces expressed clearly one thought: "He is a bore . . ." Madame Malet came in at eight-thirty and did not apologize. When he heard her come in, Monsieur Malet came in also, jovially, book in hand, and as we sat at the table the maid introduced a young American, a friend of the boys who had not been invited but who was greeted with shouts of joy. Odile, in the midst of this fracas, retained her manner of indulgent goddess; she sat next to me, smiled at her brothers' jokes, and when she saw how bewildered I was, she made them calm down. She was just as perfect to me as she had been in Florence, but I was unhappy, though I could not have described the sort of pain I felt, seeing her in the midst of this family. Throughout the triumphal song of love, I heard the recurrent reproaching tones of a Marcenat theme.

My parents called on the Malets and, despite the warm effusions of Odile's parents, retained an air of polite contempt. Luckily, father, who was very sensitive to beauty in women though he never spoke of it (and in this respect I knew I was like him) was immediately won over by Odile. When we left, he said to me:

"I am afraid you are making a mistake . . . but I can sympathize."

Mother said, "She is certainly very pretty; she is queer; she says funny things; she will have to change in some respects."

In Odile's estimation, another meeting was more important than that which brought our two families together: my introduction to her best friend, Marie-Thérèse whom she called Misa. I recall that it made me shy; I felt that Misa's opinion would carry great weight with Odile. Without having anything of Odile's beauty, she was attractive and had much grace and fine features. By Odile's side she appeared a bit unpolished, but their faces near one another made a lovely contrast. I soon began to blend them in my mind, and I thought of Misa as I would have thought of Odile's sister. There was, however, in Odile a natural refinement which made her quite different from Misa, although by birth they belonged to the same social stratum. I took them to a concert every Sunday, and I noticed how much better a listener Odile was than Misa. Odile, her eyes shut, allowed the music to pen-

etrate her, and in her happiness she seemed to forget the world. Misa, inquisitively looked around, greeted people in the audience, fingered her program, read, and irritated me by her fidgetiness. But she was a good companion, always happy, always cheerful, and I was grateful to her for having told Odile, who in turn told me, that she thought I was charming.

We spent our honeymoon in England and Scotland. I cannot recall a happier time of my life than these two months of relative solitude. We stopped at small flower-covered hotels, located by the side of brooks and lakes, and we spent our days stretched in flat, varnished boats, on cushions covered with light chintz. Odile made me a present of the lovely countryside, of the meadows dotted with bluebells, of the tulips emerging from their high stalks, of the mowed lawns soft underfoot, and of the willows with foliage dangling upon the water like the hair of a woman. I learned to love an Odile whom I had not known before, still more beautiful than the Odile of Florence. Just to watch her live was a perpetual delight. The moment she entered it, a hotel bedroom was transformed into a work of art. She had a touching and naïve affection for the mementoes of her girlhood and she had them with her, always: a little clock, a lace cushion and an edition of Shakespeare bound in gray buckskin. When later our marriage broke up, she left with the lace cushion and the Shakespeare in her hand. She hovered around life, spirit rather than woman. I wish I could depict her,

walking along the Thames or the Cam, so lightly that her step was like a dance.

Paris, on our return, seemed incongruous to us. My parents and hers thought our great desire would be to see them again. Aunt Cora was keen to give dinners for us. Odile's friends complained that they had missed her during our two months' absence, and begged me to lend her back to them for a bit, but Odile and I desired to be left alone together. That first night which we spent at our little home, the rugs not yet on the floor and a smell of fresh paint everywhere, Odile, on a delightfully sincere impulse, went to the front door and cut the bell rope. Thus, she was dismissing the outer world.

We went over the apartment together and she asked me if she could have, all to herself, a small room next to her bedroom:

"It will be my own little domain and you will come in only when I invite you; you know how frightfully independent I am, Dickie." (She had called me "Dickie" from the day she had heard a young woman in England call a man that.) "You don't know me very well yet; you'll see how impossible I am in reality."

She had bought a bottle of champagne, some pastry and a large bunch of daisies. She made a delightful setting with a low table, two armchairs and a cut-glass vase. We had the merriest and most delicious little supper. We were alone and we loved one another. I do not regret those days, fleeting as they were; I am

still able to hear within me the last harmony of our love, and if I am very still and hush the noise of the present I can hear the purity of its dying notes.

o.

Yet, it was on the day after that very evening that I suffered the first shock which marred ever so slightly the smooth surface of my love. It was an insignificant episode, but a forerunner, perhaps, of all that were to follow. We were at the upholsterer's ordering some furniture. Odile had chosen curtains which I thought were too expensive. We had a slight argument, in a very friendly manner, and she gave in to me. The salesman, a very handsome man, had sided with my wife. This exasperated me. Just as we were leaving, I saw in a mirror a look of understanding and disappointment exchanged between him and Odile. I cannot possibly tell you how it affected me. I had, since my engagement to her, the absolute certainty, unconscious, absurd perhaps, that my wife's mind was part of mine, and that our thoughts, through the effect of permanent transfusion, would always be sympathetic. I do not believe I could have harbored the idea that a human being, living with me, could be independent of me. Still less could I have accepted the thought that she could conspire against me with a stranger. Nothing could have been more fleeting or innocent than this look; I could not say anything about it, I was not even certain

that I had seen it clearly, and yet I know perfectly well that jealousy seized me at that moment.

Never, before my marriage, had I given a thought to jealousy, save as a theatrical sentiment and with utter contempt. A dramatically jealous person, for me, was Othello; Georges Dandin was a funny one. The idea that, one day, I could play the part of either, or even both at the same time, would have seemed preposterous to me. I had always broken with my mistresses when I had tired of them. If they were not faithful to me, I never knew it. I remember once saying to a friend who was tortured by jealousy, "I could never go on loving a woman who had ceased to love me. . . ."

Why should the sight of Odile among her friends have disturbed me? She was sweet and of even disposition, but I don't know why she created a sort of mysterious atmosphere around her. I had never noticed it during our engagement, or on our honeymoon, possibly because our solitude and the complete blending of our lives left no room for mystery, but in Paris, I immediately sensed an indefinite, remote danger. We were very intimate, very affectionate, but since I wish to be absolutely sincere with you, I must admit that from the second month of our life together, I knew that the real Odile was not the one I loved. I did not love the one I discovered any the less, but the quality of my love was entirely different. In Florence, I thought I had at last found my "Amazone"; from my own imagination, I had created a mythical and perfect Odile. I had been

mistaken. Odile was not a goddess made of ivory and moonlight; she was a woman; like me, like you, like all the wretched human race, she was multiple and complex. And the chances are that she, too, found me quite different from the lover in Florence with whom she had walked. As soon as I returned, I became engrossed again by the factory in Gandumas and the Paris office. My father, very much absorbed by politics, had been overworked in my absence. Our best customers complained that they were neglected. My office was far from the house which we had rented in the rue de la Faisanderie. I soon realized that going home to lunch was out of the question. And, if you add to this the fact that once a week I had to spend a day at Gandumas and that this hurried journey was too tiresome for Odile to attempt, you will see why, much against our wishes, our lives became quite separate.

When I arrived home, at night, I felt great happiness in the thought that I was again to see Odile's beautiful face. I liked the way she had furnished our home. I had never lived with beauty around me, but felt that I had been born with a need for it, and I admired her taste. In my parents' house, at Gandumas, there was too much furniture, accumulated for generations without an eye for beauty, and the pieces were spread over the living rooms which were decorated with blue-green tapestries representing peacocks among trees. Odile had the walls painted in smooth and soft tones; she liked rooms sparingly furnished and large

surfaces of plain carpet. When I entered her little boudoir, I always felt the beauty of it so keenly that it was vaguely disturbing. She was often lying on a lounge, usually dressed in white, a tall, slender Venetian vase containing one flower with fluffy foliage on the low table upon which our first supper had been served. She loved flowers above all else, and I chose them for her. I followed the sequence of the seasons by the florists' windows; I saw the chrysanthemum or the tulip season return, with pleasure, because they were the means by which I could evoke Odile's radiant smiles. When I came in from my office with a stiff white box in my hands, she would get up, with a joyous, "Oh, thank you, Dickie . . ." She admired them, delighted, but soon becoming serious she would say, "I am going to arrange my flowers," and for an hour she fussed about the appropriate vase, the length of the stems, the light in which she would place them in order to give an iris or a rose the most graceful curve.

This little excitement over, the evening often became strangely dull, giving the impression of large black clouds enveloping the world, abruptly, on a sunny day. We had little to say to one another. I had tried, many times, to speak of my business affairs with Odile, but she had no interest in them. My childhood recollections lost their novelty. I had so little time to read that I did not develop new ideas. She felt it. I tried to bring my most intimate friends into our life. But André Halff was most unsympathetic to Odile; she

found him sarcastic, brutal almost, and I must say that she was right. Once I said to him,

"You don't care much for Odile, do you?"

"Well, I think she is beautiful."

"I know . . . but not very intelligent?"

"That's so. . . . But a woman has no need to be intelligent."

"You're mistaken; Odile is very intelligent, but her kind of intelligence is not yours; she is intuitive, positive. . . ."

"Quite likely," he said.

With Bertrand, it was altogether different. He tried to cultivate a confidential, understanding friendship with Odile, but he encountered antagonism; she was always on the defensive with him. Bertrand and I were quite disposed to spend an evening, smoking together, re-ordering the world. Odile preferred to end the day in theaters, night clubs, and fairs. Once she made me wander for three hours among the booths, merry-go-rounds, shooting galleries and lotteries of an outdoor fair. Her two brothers accompanied us. With these two youngsters, spoiled, merry and somewhat unruly, she always felt at ease. About midnight, I said,

"Odile, haven't you had about enough of this? You must admit it is somewhat ridiculous; you can't possibly find any more pleasure in throwing balls at bottles, going around in fake automobiles, or winning a glass boat after having played the wheel forty times?"

She answered me by quoting a sentence from some philosopher to which I had called her attention, "What does it matter if a pleasure is artificial, so long as one believes it is genuine . . ." and taking her brother's arm she ran, laughing, toward the shooting gallery. She was a good shot and she felled ten eggs in succession, and that put her in good humor.

At the time of our marriage, I believed that Odile had the same dislike of society that I had. In that I was mistaken. She loved dinners and balls, and as soon as she realized the sort of people that made up Aunt Cora's salon she insisted on going there every Tuesday. My sole desire since our marriage was to have Odile all to myself; the only time I was perfectly content was when I knew that her great beauty was confined within the circle of my household. This feeling was so strong that I was happiest when Odile, rather frail by nature and often the victim of overfatigue, had to remain in bed for a few days. I would then spend the evening in an armchair by her bedside, reading to her, or we would have talks which she called "palavers." I soon learned the type of book which would concentrate her attention. Her taste was not bad, but to interest her a book had to be sad or sentimental. She loved Fromentin's *Dominique*, some of Turgenev's novels and a few English poets.

"It's funny," I once said to her, "to one who did not know you well, you would appear frivolous, but in reality you like only sad books."

"But, Dickie, I am very melancholy at heart. Perhaps that explains my frivolity; then you know I don't want to show myself to everybody just as I am."

"Not even to me?"

"To you, yes, of course . . . do you remember Florence?"

"Rather, I learned to know you well in Florence . . . but now you are an entirely different person, dear."

"One can't always be the same."

"You never say nice things to me any more."

"How can one say nice things to order? Be patient; they may come later."

"The same as in Florence?"

"Of course, Dickie. I have not changed."

Then she would give me her hand and, while I held it, she would start another palaver on my family, or hers, on Misa, on a dress that she intended to order, on life. Those evenings, when she was tired and tender, she was really like the mythical Odile whom I had created. Charming and frail, she was at my mercy. I was grateful for her languor. As soon as she was strong again, and went out, she was once more the mysterious Odile.

She never told me, of her own accord, as so many simple, talkative women do, what she had done in my absence. If I asked her she answered briefly, but never very responsively. What she said never enabled me to form a satisfactory mental picture of the events that

had occurred. Later, I recalled that one of her friends told me, with the typical harshness that women display toward one another, that Odile was a mythomaniac. That was not true, and at the time it was said to me it made me quite indignant, but later, when I thought it over, I could see quite easily what it was in Odile that might lead to such an impression . . . a sort of disinterestedness in her narrative . . . profound disregard of precision. When, astonished at details that seemed incredible, I would ask a searching question, she would become mute, as a child does when a teacher asks something that it cannot answer.

One day, contrary to my custom, I lunched at home. At two o'clock Odile told the maid to bring her hat and coat.

"What are you doing this afternoon?" I asked.

"Going to the dentist," she replied.

"Yes, dear, I know; but just now I heard you telephone for a three o'clock appointment. What are you going to do until then?"

"Nothing in particular, only I don't want to rush."

"But my child, this is absurd. His office is in the rue Malakoff. It will take you only a few minutes to get there, and you start a whole hour ahead of time. Where are you going?"

She said, "You amuse me," and with that she went out.

That evening after dinner, I could not refrain from asking,

"What did you do between two and three this afternoon?"

She tried to joke about it, but as I became insistent, she got up and went to bed without saying good night. That had never happened before. I went to apologize to her. She kissed me. When she was quite smooth again, and just before leaving, I said,

"Now be a dear and tell me what you did between two and three."

At that she burst into laughter. Later during the night, I heard some noise in her room and I went there and found her crying. Why did she cry? Was it from shame or from anger? She answered my question by saying,

"Don't be stupid. I love you immensely, but you must learn to handle me with a little more tact. I am frightfully proud. Loving you as I do, I might leave you after a few scenes like this one . . . I am probably wrong, but you must take me as I am."

"Darling," I said, "I shall do my best; but you must try to change a bit, too; you say, you are proud . . . couldn't you some time try to dominate your pride?"

She shook her head, stubbornly.

"No, I can't change myself. You always say that one of the things you love in me is my lack of artificiality. If I changed, I should no longer be natural. You must change, not I."

"Dear, I shall never be able to change so that I can understand what to me is beyond understanding. I

have been brought up by a father who, above everything, always emphasized respect for facts, for precision . . . that's the way my mind is shaped. No, I must insist I shall never be able to say truthfully that I understand what you did to-day between two and three."

"Oh! I am sick of it," she said, harshly. And, turning on her side, she pretended to go to sleep.

The next day I thought she would be cross, but, on the contrary, she greeted me cheerfully and seemed to have forgotten the episode. It was Sunday. She asked me to go to a concert with her. They played "The Miracle of Good Friday," which we both liked. When it was over, she wanted to have tea somewhere. There was no one more delightful than Odile when she was gay—happy to be alive; it was so obvious that she was made for happiness that it seemed somehow criminal not to give it to her, abundantly. Every time I looked at her, that Sunday, so animated, so exuberant, I could scarcely believe that we had had a quarrel the previous day. But the more I knew my wife, the more I realized her capacity for forgetting; in that, she was just like a child. Nothing was more opposed to my own nature which noted, accumulated and registered impressions. On that day, life for Odile was a picnic of tea, buttered toast, and fresh cream. While she smiled at me, I thought, "The element that divides people most is that some live largely in the past, others in the present."

I was still a bit hurt, but I could not hold any bitter-

ness against her; I blamed myself, and filled with good resolutions I silently swore that I would never again ask vain questions, that I would try to have confidence in her. We walked home, through the Champs-Elysées; Odile inhaled with delight the fresh autumn air. It seemed to me that, as during that spring in Florence, everything united to sing the knight-errant theme: the colorful leaves, the gray and golden light, the whole joyous animation of Paris, the children's boats on the pond, with sails leaning toward the water, the fountain in the center. I quoted to myself a sentence which I had read in *The Imitation of Christ*, and which I had learned to use in my relationship with Odile, "Here I am in your presence, your slave, prepared for anything, since I desire nothing for myself, but everything for you."

Whenever I succeeded, as I had just done, in overcoming my own pride and in humbling myself, not so much to Odile but to my love for Odile, I felt better satisfied with myself.

7.

The person whom Odile saw most frequently was Misa. She telephoned her every morning and sometimes their conversation lasted an hour; they went out together every afternoon. This friendship pleased me, for I realized that it kept Odile from danger while I was in my office. I was even glad to have Misa at our

house Sundays, and frequently when Odile and I made little trips of two or three days together, it was I who suggested that her friend come with us. I want to make as clear to you as possible the feelings that guided me at that time, for they will make it easier for you to understand the strange rôle that Misa subsequently played in my life. In the first place, if I still wanted to be alone with Odile as in the early weeks of our marriage, it was due to a vague fear of what outsiders might bring into our life rather than to a positive pleasure in being with her. I did not love her less, but I realized that our points of contact would always be limited and that she tolerated out of courtesy, rather than enjoyed, serious and intelligent conversation. I must admit, however, that I was constantly getting more pleasure in the somewhat silly, frivolous, aimless converse which Odile dubbed "palavers," but which was conversation for her when she was natural. Odile was never more herself than when she was with Misa. The childishness which they revealed in their chatter amused me much, and touched me too, because it showed me what Odile might have been like as a child. One evening at the hotel in Dieppe, I was delighted when I saw Odile, during a heated discussion with her friend, hurl a pillow at her head as she shouted, "You naughty girl."

There also developed in me a more disturbing feeling, one that always comes when a young woman is projected by circumstances, not by love, into the daily life of a man. Because of our trips together and of

Odile's intimacy with Misa which facilitated mine, I became almost as familiar with her as I would have been with a mistress. One day, while we were discussing the physical strength of women, she challenged me. We wrestled for a moment; I threw her down, then got up, slightly ashamed of myself.

"What babies you are!" Odile said.

Misa remained stretched on the floor a long time, gazing at me intently.

She was, however, the only friend we received, Odile and I, with equal pleasure. The visits of Halff and Bertrand now became increasingly rare, and I must say I was not sorry. I soon came to share Odile's feeling for them. In her conversations with them, I was torn with conflicting emotions. Seeing her through their eyes, I realized with what gratuitous levity she treated serious thoughts. At the same time, I preferred her frivolity to their theories. Thus, I was ashamed of my wife before my friends, and proud of her before myself. When they had gone, I said to myself, "Just the same Odile is their superior, for she is in closer contact with life and nature."

Odile did not like my family and I had no great love for hers. My mother had tried to advise her about furniture, mode of life, and the duties of a young wife. Such advice was the last thing Odile wanted. She always shocked me when she spoke of the Marcenats. I was bored at Gandumas. I realized that all the pleasures of life were sacrificed there to family conventions

whose origin was by no means sacred, but at the same time I was proud of the austerity of our traditions. Paris life in which the Marcenats cut no figure should have cured me of my mania to give them great importance, but like the members of small religious communities who, transported into barbaric countries see millions of men worshiping other gods than theirs without feeling their own faith disturbed, the Marcenats, transported into pagan society, preserved the memory of Limousin and recalled the past grandeur of their tribe.

My father, who admired Odile, could not help being irritated by her. He did not show it. He was much too kind and too reserved. I, who knew his sensitiveness, for I had inherited it, realized keenly how Odile's bearing made him suffer. When my wife was perplexed or angry, she made no effort to conceal it, but it was soon forgotten. That was not the Marcenats' idea of human behavior. When Odile said to me, "Your mother came here while I was out, and will you believe that she dared scold the butler . . . I am going to telephone her; I shan't stand for such things . . .", I begged her to wait.

"Look here, Odile. You are absolutely right, but do not attempt to tell her so yourself. All you will do is to make her angry. Let me do it, or better still, get Aunt Cora to tell mother that you have said that . . ."

Odile burst into laughter.

"You don't realize how funny your family is, all of

them. But they are terrible just the same. Yes, Dickie, terrible, and I love you less when I see the caricatures of you all these people are. I know very well that you are not like them by nature, but nevertheless their stamp is on you."

The first summer we spent at Gandumas was painful. We lunched exactly at midday, and the idea that my father could be kept waiting never occurred to me. Odile would take a book and go out in the fields, wander beside the stream and forget all about time. I can see my father now pacing up and down the library, and I rushing across the park seeking my wife and returning breathless to the house, not having found her. Then she would come sauntering along calmly, smiling, quite happy after having been warmed in the sun; when at the beginning of the meal the general silence conveyed disapprobation, which from a group of Marcenats could only be indirect and mute, Odile would look at us with a smile in which I detected amusement and challenge.

At the Malets, where we dined once a week, the situation was reversed. It was I who felt observed and judged. No ceremony attended meals there. The Malet boys left the table to get bread. Monsieur Malet would attempt to quote something he had read and, unable to do so, would go for the book. Conversation was quite unrestrained. I hated to hear Monsieur Malet introduce indecent topics when his daughter was present. I realized how absurd it was to attach such importance to trifling details, but it was not so much a

judgment as a painful impression. I was never comfortable at the Malets. The atmosphere was unsalubrious for me. I loathed myself for being solemn and tiresome, and although self-reproachful for my silence, I remained so.

But at the Malets, as at Gandumas, my discomfort was only superficial; at heart I was happy, happy seeing Odile live. When I sat face to face with her at the table, I gazed at her steadily; the glow of her face was luminous. She reminded me of a beautiful diamond seen by moonlight; at that time, she dressed nearly always in white, and at home she surrounded herself with white flowers. What a curious combination of candor and mystery she was! Though I felt myself living with a child, sometimes when she spoke with another man I detected in her expression the reflection of sentiments that alarmed me, like the distant roar of people in the throes of passion.

8.

I have been telling you all this that you may understand the original themes that formed the key of the unfinished symphony which represents my life. Later, other themes were used and, played on noisier instruments, they drowned the first. You may already have recognized the knight-errant theme, and the cynic theme. Possibly you were able to detect in that absurd scene at the upholsterer's, which in my determination

to be truthful I had to relate, the first call of jealousy, remote though it was. Be indulgent now, and try to understand rather than judge. I must make an effort to finish this story; it will be a painful one, for I desire to be exact. I wish to depict it all the more now that I believe I am cured; I shall attempt to speak of my madness with the objectivity of a physician describing the delirium of which he has been the victim.

There are certain diseases which begin slowly, with increasing *malaise;* there are others that begin abruptly, with high fever, and reach their full development in one day. Jealousy seized me abruptly and violently. Now that I am quieted and seek to fathom its causes, it seems to me they were diverse. First, there was my great love for Odile and the natural desire that I had to keep for myself every particle of the precious fabric of Odile's life: her words, her smiles, her looks. But this desire could not have been the chief cause, for when I had Odile all to myself (when we were alone evenings at home, or when I took her with me on a trip of two or three days, for instance) she complained that I seemed much more absorbed in my books and thoughts than in her. It was only when she was free to be with others that I clamored to have her to myself. This desire was rooted more in vanity than in anything else; it was a kind of inherent vanity, masked by modesty and reserve which I got from my father's side of the family. I wanted to have dominion over the forest, the water, the huge machines that

turned out great sheets of white paper, the houses of the peasants, the cottages of the workers. I wanted to know everything that went on in her little head, beneath her wavy hair, in the same way as I knew each day, from invoices and statements sent from Limousin, how many pounds of Whatman remained in stock and what the daily output of the factory had been the week before.

I know, from the sharp pain I feel when I insist on that particular point, that the source of the whole evil was acute mental curiosity. I did not admit then that there were things I could not understand. Yet it was impossible to understand Odile, and I believe that no man in love with her could have lived with her without suffering. I even believe that, had she been different, I would never have known what jealousy was, because man is not born jealous; he merely comes into the world with a nature which is receptive and susceptible to the disease. Odile, because of her very make-up and quite unwittingly, was constantly arousing my curiosity. For me and for all my family the incidents and happenings of a day constituted definite pictures; one had only to describe them accurately to make all the elements of the narrative dovetail so perfectly that it left no room for doubt. But such events going through Odile's mind constituted a confused and hazy picture.

I do not wish to give the impression that she deliberately falsified. It was much more complex than that. The gist of the matter is that words and statements had

small value for her; she was as beautiful as a figure one sees in a dream, and she spent her life in a sort of dream. I have told you that she lived wholly in the present. She made up the past and the future, on the spur of the moment, just as she needed them, and she forgot what she made up. Had she been determined to deceive me, she would have tried at least to reconcile her statements and to give them an air of credibility. I never knew her to take that trouble. She contradicted herself within one sentence. Once, after having been absent at the factory for several days, I asked her when I got home,

"What did you do Sunday?"

"Sunday? I don't remember. . . . Oh! yes, I know, I was horribly tired and I stayed in bed all day."

Five minutes later, as we happened to speak of music, she exclaimed suddenly,

"I nearly forgot to tell you. Last Sunday at the concert I heard that Ravel Waltz you told me about. I loved it."

"But, Odile, do you realize what you are saying? You must be losing your mind. . . . You know perfectly well whether you were in bed or at the concert Sunday, and you don't suppose for a moment I can believe both statements, do you?"

"I am not asking you to believe either one. When I am tired I say anything. I don't listen myself to what I say."

"All right. Now try to recall accurately what you

did last Sunday. Did you stay in bed or did you go to the concert?"

For a moment, she remained nonplused, and then said,

"I don't remember. How can I? When you assume that inquisitorial look, I lose my mind altogether."

Such conversations left me very miserable; upset, nervous, unable to sleep, I would spend hours trying to make out, from the slightest clues I had, how Odile had passed the day. I went over all those distressing friends who were part of Odile's life before our marriage. So far as she was concerned, she showed the same ease in forgetting such scenes as in forgetting everything else. I would leave her cross and sulky in the morning, and find her happy and gay when I returned in the evening. I would come home with a speech like this, all ready, "Look here, darling, this can't go on any longer; we'll have to separate. I don't wish a separation, but you'll have to make some effort to avoid it; you'll have to reform in some ways." Instead, I was greeted by a charming girl, in a new frock, who kissed me and said, "Do you know what? Misa has just telephoned. She has three seats for the Œuvre Theatre to-night and we are going to see 'The Doll's House.'" Half from weakness, half from love, I would accept this comforting though impossible sop.

I was too proud to show how much I suffered, and more than any one else, my parents were not to know

of it. Only two human beings seemed to have divined what was going on within me the first year of our marriage. One was my cousin Renée, and that astonished me for we had seen very little of each other. She led an independent life which annoyed our family almost as much as my marriage had done. During a cure which my Uncle Pierre took at Vittel every year, she had met a Paris physician and his wife and had become very friendly with them. As a child, Renée had been rebellious and hard to manage, and from early adolescence she had displayed hostility to Marcenat ideals. Latterly, she had spent more and more time in the home of her new friends in Paris. Dr. Prud'homme was wealthy and did not practice medicine; he did cancer research work and his wife helped him. Renée, like her father, was both thorough and efficient. (She was all the more antagonistic to her father because she was so much like him.) In a short time she was accepted by the scientists to whom her new friends had introduced her as one of them. When she was twenty-one she asked her father for her patrimony and permission to live in Paris. For a few months she had little or no contact with her family or relatives, but the Marcenats were too beholden to the fictitious belief that the love between parents and children is indestructible to hold out in such a quarrel. As soon as my Uncle Pierre was convinced that his daughter's decision was irrevocable, he yielded in order to restore peace. From time to time he indulged in violent ver-

bal tirades, but they became less and less frequent. Finally he begged his daughter to marry, but she would not hear of it. She threatened never to set foot in Chardeuil if he insisted, and both my uncle and his wife, helpless, promised never to mention marriage again.

Renée had come to our engagement dinner and had sent Odile a large basket of white lilies. I remember that this had astonished me; her parents had given us a beautiful present, and I could not understand why their daughter should send us flowers. A few months later when we dined at Uncle Pierre's, she was there. I invited her to come to see us. When she came she was very cordial to Odile and I was tremendously interested in what she told us about her doings. Since I had ceased seeing much of my old friends, I rarely heard such constructive and sensible talk. When she left, I accompanied her to the door. "How beautiful your wife is," she said with real admiration. Then she looked at me sadly and added,

"You are happy, aren't you?"

It was said in such a tone that I knew she did not think I was.

The other woman who raised the veil for a moment was Misa. Her attitude had become queer during the past few months. It seemed to me that she was more anxious to become my friend than to remain Odile's. One evening, Odile being ill and in bed (she had had two unfortunate mishaps and it seemed now quite certain

that she never would have children) Misa had come to spend the evening. She sat with me on a divan, near the foot of the bed. We were close to one another and almost entirely hidden from Odile's eyes by the high footboard. Lying down as she was, she could only see our heads. Misa moved closer, pressed against me for a moment and seized my hand. I was astonished, and I don't understand even to-day how it was that Odile did not notice my expression. Reluctantly, I moved away, and that night, seeing Misa home, almost involuntarily, I gave her a light kiss. She did not seem to object. I said,

"It's not fair . . . poor Odile. . . ."

"Poor Odile, indeed," she said, shrugging her shoulders contemptuously.

That displeased me and my attitude toward Misa became cold. And it upset me, too, for I wondered if her remark did not mean that Odile was not worthy that one should worry about her.

9.

Two months later, Misa became engaged. Odile said she could not understand Misa's decision. In her opinion, Julien Godet was quite ordinary. He was a young engineer, just out of college and as Monsieur Malet said, "without a job." Misa gave the impression that she was trying to love him, rather than that she was in love with him. He, on the other hand, was ardently

in love with her. For some time, father had been on the lookout for a director of a paper mill he had recently opened at Guichardie, near Gandumas. When he heard of Misa's engagement, it occurred to him that he might offer the position to Godet. I was not very much taken with the idea, for I no longer felt at ease with Misa, but Odile, who loved to be of service to others, thanked my father and carried the good news immediately to her friend.

"Be careful," I said, "don't forget you are sending Misa to live in Limousin and taking her away from your life here."

"I realize that, but I am doing it for her, not for myself; and of course I shall see her during those horrible weeks we have to spend at Gandumas. That will help, I assure you; and whenever she feels like coming to Paris, she can always stay with her family or here. . . . And that husband of hers has to do something, some day, and if you don't take him on, he will take Misa off to Grenoble or Castelnaudary."

Misa and her husband accepted the offer promptly and though it was midwinter Odile went at once to Gandumas, to find a house for them, and to introduce them to the people of the town. I have not mentioned frequently enough that it was one of Odile's marked characteristics to devote herself whole-heartedly to her friends.

I believe that the going away of Misa was prejudicial to our own happiness, for its immediate effect was

to throw Odile back into a group of people most antipathetic to me. Before our marriage, Odile had often gone out alone with young men; they took her to the theater; she had even taken short journeys with her brothers and their friends. She admitted this very frankly to me at the time of our engagement and she had warned me that she would not be able to give up her independence. At that time, I wanted her more than anything in the world, and I told her in good faith that it was quite natural she should feel that way; I also promised her that I would never interfere with her friendships.

It is so unjust and absurd to make human beings fulfill their promises. When I made that promise to Odile, I did not realize at all the feelings that I would have when I should see a man greeted with the same look and the same smile with which I was greeted, and which I prized so highly. You may be astonished to hear that the rather mediocre quality of Odile's friends was also a source of pain to me. Logically, it should have comforted me, but it did not; indeed, it hurt me. When a man loves a woman as deeply as I loved my wife, his love adorns everything that touches her image with imaginary virtues and qualities; in the same way as the town where he met her for the first time seems more beautiful than it is in reality, the restaurant where he dined with her better than any other, the rival, though he is hated, takes on some of this adornment. Were the mysterious composer who orches-

trates our lives to sound for us the theme of rivalry, I believe its solo would be practically the same as the knight-errant theme, ironical and distorted. We would like to find in this opponent one who is worthy of us. That is why the most bitter of all disappointments a woman may cause us is frequently the rival she opposes to us. Had I found Odile surrounded by notable men of our time, I should have been jealous but not astonished; but instead of that I saw her invariably with young men who, judged impartially, were not more mediocre than the average, but they were not worthy of her, and not even of her own choosing.

"Odile, why are you such a flirt? I can see why a plain woman might want to try her power over men, but you . . . it's a game in which you can't lose; it is cruel, my dear, and not very loyal. . . . And your selection of people is hard to understand. . . . For instance, this Jean Bernier, whom you see so often, what do you see in him that interests you? He is not good-looking, he is commonplace. . . ."

"Well, he amuses me."

"How can he amuse you? You are clever and you have exquisite taste. I have not heard the sort of stories he tells since I left the army, and they are the kind I would not think of telling in your presence. . . ."

"I daresay you are right; he is homely and he may be vulgar, though I have not found him to be so, but I like him."

"You don't love him, do you?"

"Mercy no, are you crazy? I wouldn't even have him touch me; he makes me think of a slug."

"My dear, you may not love him, but he loves you; that's obvious. You make two men miserable, him and me; what's the good of it?"

"You think every one is in love with me. . . . I am not so irresistible. . . ."

And she'd say that with such a charming smile that I would smile also and kiss her.

"But you'll see less of him, won't you, dear?"

Then her face would take on an unyielding expression.

"I have not said I would."

"No, you haven't, but I am asking you to. How can it matter much to you . . . and it would give me such pleasure. You say yourself you don't care for him. . . ." For a moment, she would look perplexed and seem to be debating with herself, and then with a faint smile of embarrassment,

"I don't know, Dickie, I don't believe I can help it. It amuses me so."

Poor Odile! She said this with an air so childish and so sincere! Then I would show her with useless and unanswerable logic that it was easy to help it.

"The great trouble with you is that you accept yourself just as you are, as though one were born with a ready-made personality. But one can make oneself over, change one's personality. . . ."

"All right, make yours over, then."

"I am willing to try, but you've got to help me by trying, too."

"No, I have told you time after time that I can't do it. And then, too, I don't want to change."

When I think back to this far-away time, I wonder if her attitude was not due to some instinctive, deep-seated feeling. If she had changed as I asked her to do, would I have continued to love her as much? Would I have been able to endure the constant presence of this futile little human being if scenes like these had not made boredom impossible? Then, too, it was not true that she had not tried. Odile was not heartless. When she saw me miserable, she thought she was ready to do anything to help me, but her kindness was no match for her weakness; so life remained unchanged.

I had learned to recognize her "conquest-bent" air; her gayety would rise half a tone above normal; her eyes would become more brilliant, her face more beautiful, and her habitual languor would disappear. When a man attracted her, I knew it before she did. It was agony. . . . At such times her words in Florence came back to me, "Perhaps I have been too tender and therefore thou mayst think my 'havior light."

When I recall this miserable period as I frequently do, what saddens me most is the thought that Odile, despite appearances, was faithful to me and that perhaps, had I been less clumsy, I might have kept her love. But it was not easy to know how to handle Odile; display of affection was not attractive to her; it bored

her at times, and when it did, she responded with sharpness and a touch of hostility; threats would have prompted her to most reckless acts.

One of the most distinctive traits in her make-up was love of danger. Cruising in a yacht in the teeth of a tempest, driving a racing machine on a dangerous track, taking jumps on horseback too high for safety, were her pleasure. A group of daring young men hovered around her. But she seemed to have no preference for any one of them, and every time I had occasion to overhear their conversations it seemed to me that her friendships were keyed on a note of sporting comradeship. Furthermore, I have now in my hands (I shall tell you why) many letters those men wrote to Odile; they all showed she tolerated a sort of flirtatious badinage, but that she had yielded to none of them.

"Strange Odile," one of them wrote, "at once so reckless and so chaste; too chaste for my taste." And another, a young Englishman, sentimental and religious, wrote "Since it is now certain I shall never possess you in this world, I hope I shall be near you in the next." But these are things that I learned only much later, and in those days I could not believe in the innocence of such free living.

To be quite just to her, I must add one detail which I nearly forgot. In the early days of our married life, she had tried to interest me in her new and old friendships; she would have shared all her friends with me, willingly. This Englishman, for instance, we had met

at Biarritz during our first summer holidays. He had amused Odile teaching her to play the banjo which was a novelty then, and by singing negro songs to her. When we left, he insisted on making her a present of the banjo which displeased me immensely. A fortnight later, she said to me,

"Dickie, I have received a letter from young Douglas in English; will you help me read it and answer it?"

I don't know what devil possessed me then; I told her, with ill-suppressed anger, that I certainly hoped she would not answer his letter, that Douglas was a little fool and that I did not like him. None of it was true; Douglas was well-bred, attractive and, before my marriage, I would have liked him very much. But I had developed the habit of never listening to what my wife said without wondering what she was concealing. Whenever there was an obscure point in her stories, I always framed an ingenious theory which explained why she wished it to be obscure. When I thought I knew why she lied I felt a sort of painful satisfaction—a sensuous pain. As a rule my memory is not very good, but it was prodigious when it concerned Odile's stories. I remembered the most insignificant of her words; I compared them, I weighed them. Sometimes, I said to her,

"Do you mean to tell me you had a fitting of your new suit to-day? That makes the fourth fitting. You went on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday of last week."

She would look at me, smile without embarrassment, and say,

"You have a devilish memory."

I was angry that she had tried to fool me—proud that I had not been taken in. But my discoveries were of no avail, for I never did anything about it. I had no desire to do so, and Odile's amazing coolness did not encourage scenes. I was at once miserable and extremely interested.

The thing that prevented me from acting brutally, for instance forbidding Odile to see certain of her friends, was that I realized to what ridiculous mistakes my desperate deductions led me. I recall, among other incidents, that she had been complaining of headaches and general fatigue for several weeks, and expressed a wish to spend a few days in the country. I could not leave Paris just then and for a long time I would not let her go. This apparent lack of concern about her health was selfish—but I did not realize it at the time.

At last, I thought it was wiser to let her go to Chantilly where she wanted to go, and to surprise her there the next day. If she were not alone (and I was fairly sure she would not be) at least I would know something definite and I would be in a position to act: shame her, leave her. (I thought I wanted to leave her, which in reality was not the case.) She left. The next day, I hired an automobile—foreseeing a scandal, I did not want our chauffeur to get wind of it—and left for

Chantilly after dinner. Half-way there, I told the man to return to Paris, but after three miles, devoured by curiosity, I made him turn again toward Chantilly. At the hotel I asked for Odile's room number. They would not give it to me. That seemed most significant, I thought. I showed my papers. I proved I was her husband and finally a bell-boy took me up. She was alone, surrounded with books, and she had written many letters. But had she not had time to stage all this?

"How far-fetched all this is," she said, pitying me. "What are you afraid of? That I might be with a man? What should I want with a man? What you will not understand is that I want to be alone for the sake of being alone. And, if you insist that I tell you the whole truth, I want particularly not to see you for a few days. You tire me so horribly with your fears, your suspicions, that I have to watch every word I say, to be careful not to contradict myself, just as though I were a criminal being cross-examined. . . . I have had a perfect day here. I have read, thought, slept, walked in the park. To-morrow, I shall see the miniature exhibit at the château. It's all so simple, if you only knew it."

But I was already thinking: "Now, all the bolder by this victory, she will know that next time she may have her lover come, without danger."

Ah, this lover of Odile's. How many times have I tried to picture him to myself. I made him up of all the

mysterious things that I read in her mind and in her words. I had become incredibly subtle in this ability to analyze her. I credited this unknown person with any particularly delightful idea she expressed. Soon, a strange relationship was established between Odile and me. I told her all my thoughts, even the most shameless ones, when they concerned her. She would listen to me attentively, almost indulgently, perhaps a little irritated, but flattered also that she should be the object of so much curiosity and interest.

She was ailing most of the time, and went to bed very early. I spent most of my evenings at her bedside. Strange, and somehow lovely evenings. I would tell her the flaws in her character, she would listen to me, smilingly, then take my hand in hers and say,

"Poor Dickie, how you do worry about a miserable little girl who is nasty, stupid, vain, coquettish. . . . Because I am all that, aren't I?"

'You are not at all stupid," I would say, "you are not very intelligent, but you have astonishing intuition and much taste."

"Well, I have taste, that's something. Listen, Dickie, I am going to read some English verse to you. I have just discovered it, and I love it."

She had good natural taste; she seldom liked the mediocre in anything, but in the choice of the poetry which she read to me, I noticed with disturbed astonishment that she displayed a taste for the sentimental, a profound understanding of passion and sometimes a

longing for death. I remember particularly one stanza she repeated frequently:

*From too much love of living*
*From hope and fear set free,*
*We thank, with brief thanksgiving,*
*Whatever Gods may be,*
*That no life lives forever,*
*That dead men rise up never,*
*That even the weariest river*
*Winds somewhere safe to sea.*

"The weariest river," she would repeat, "the weariest river, I love that. . . . I am the weariest river, Dickie. And I am going slowly toward the sea."

"Don't be silly," I said, "you are the very essence of life."

"Oh yes, I look that way," she'd say with a half-sad, half-comical face, "but I am a very weary river."

When I left her, after such an evening, I would say: "After all, despite all your faults, I love you, Odile."

"So do I love you, Dickie," she would answer.

## 10.

For a long time, father had been asking me to go to Sweden, on business. We bought our pulp there through brokers; it was evident that we could obtain it more economically by buying directly from the producers, and he did not feel well enough to undertake

the journey himself. I said I would not go unless Odile went with me, but she showed no desire to go. This reluctance excited my suspicion. She loved to travel. I proposed, if she objected to going by train through Germany and Denmark, that we go by steamer from Havre or Boulogne, which should have been a great incentive for her.

"No," she said, "go without me; Sweden does not attract me; it's too cold there."

"Not a bit, Odile . . . it is a wonderful country; it was made for you, I am sure; you will find plenty of solitude, large lakes surrounded with pine trees, old châteaux . . ."

"Really? No, I have no desire to leave Paris just now. . . . But why don't you go, since your father wants it. It will do you good to see other women. They say the Swedes are most attractive, tall, blonde, pale. Just the type you like . . . go ahead, play around with other women—"

Finally, it became impossible for me to put off this trip. I confessed to Odile, with great humility, that the thought of leaving her alone in Paris frightened me.

"How funny you are, I shan't go out, I promise you; I have a lot of books to read, and I shall take all my meals at mother's."

I was in an uneasy frame of mind when I left Paris, and the first three days were agony. During the long journey from Paris to Hamburg, I could picture Odile

in her boudoir, entertaining a man whose face I could not see, and who played for her all the music that she loved. I saw her smiling and lively, on her face that happy expression which, in other days, had been all for me, and which I should have loved to own, to lock up and keep jealously for myself alone. Which one of all her intimates had kept her in Paris? Was it that stupid Bernier, or was it the American friend of her brothers, Lansdale? At Malmoe, the quaintly painted train, the strangeness of the colors purged me of my melancholy thoughts. At Stockholm, I found a letter from Odile. They were curious, those letters of Odile. She wrote just like a little girl; she said, "I am very well; I don't do anything; it rains; I read; I have reread *War and Peace*. I lunched with mother. Your mother has been in to see me," and she went on thus, in little sentences which meant nothing but which, I can't tell why, had a most reassuring effect on me, possibly just because of their emptiness and naïve simplicity.

The days that followed served only to increase this feeling of peace. It was strange; I loved Odile better there than I did in Paris. I could picture her, grave, a little languid, stretched upon a chaise-longue reading, a vase, containing a carnation or a rose, by her side. As my mind was quite clear despite my delusions, I said to myself, "Why is it that I do not suffer? I ought to be most miserable. I know nothing of what she is doing. She is quite free to write me just what she wants to write." I realized what I already knew, that absence,

while favoring the crystallization of love, calms jealousy for a time; because, removing from the mind all the trivial occurrences, all the little observations upon which it builds its dangerous and horrible strength, absence forces it to quiet and repose. The business that had taken me to Sweden obliged me to travel through the country. I stopped with the owners of large forests; I drank the drinks of the country; I ate caviar and smoked salmon; the women had a certain cold, metallic beauty; I spent entire days without thinking of Odile or her doings.

I recall one evening in particular. I had dined in the country, in a suburb of Stockholm, and after dinner my hostess suggested a walk through the park; we were wrapped in furs; the air was icy. Big blonde servants opened a wrought-iron gate and we found ourselves by the border of a lake, thick with ice, which shimmered softly under the midnight sun. The woman who was with me was attractive and merry; a few minutes before, she had played some "Preludes" with such easy grace, such delicacy that it brought tears to my eyes. For a second, I experienced a feeling of extraordinary happiness. "How lovely the world is," I thought, "and how easy it is to be happy."

On the return journey to Paris, the blue devils took possession of me again. The things that Odile told me of her long days of solitude were so barren that in order to fill these vast spaces, the most painful hypotheses were necessary.

"What did you do all the time I was away?"

"Nothing. I rested, I daydreamed, I read."

"What did you read?"

"I wrote it to you. I read *War and Peace*."

"But it did not take you a fortnight to read one novel."

"No, but I did other things; I put my drawers and closets in order; I arranged my books; I caught up with my letters; I went to dressmakers."

"Whom did you see while I was away?"

"No one. I told you in my letters; I saw your mother, mine, my brothers, Misa . . . and I practised on the piano a lot."

While talking, she became a little more animated, and spoke of some Spanish music, that she had recently discovered, something of Albeniz and Granados.

"And now, Dickie, I want you to take me to hear the 'Devil's Apprentice.' It is so perfect . . ."

"Isn't it based on one of Goethe's poems?"

"Yes," she said with animation.

I looked at her. How could she possibly know this poem? I knew that Odile had never read Goethe. With whom had she gone to the concert?

She divined my suspicion from the expression on my face, and said,

"I saw it in the program."

II.

We dined at Aunt Cora's on the Tuesday that followed my return from Sweden. She invited us twice a month and she, of all my family, was the only person for whom Odile had any affection. Aunt Cora, who considered Odile a charming and graceful addition to her dinner table, showed her much kindness and reproached me for having become so taciturn since my marriage. "You are dull," she said, "and you pay too much attention to your wife; married couples are bearable at dinner only when they have become indifferent to one another. Odile is delightful, but you won't be presentable for another two years, three perhaps; however, now that you are just back from Sweden, I hope you will be scintillating to-night."

In fact, the success of the dinner was not at all due to me, but to a young man whom I knew fairly well, for he was a friend of André Halff at whose house I had met him. He spoke of himself with a queer mixture of esteem, shyness and irony. He had been brought to my aunt's house by Admiral Garnier, general chief of staff of the navy. François de Crozant, a lieutenant in the navy, had recently returned from the Far East. That night, he described Japanese scenery vividly, spoke poetically of Conrad and of Gauguin brilliantly. I could not help admiring him though he was not attractive to me. While he was talking, I

recalled certain details of his personality that André had given me. He had been to the Orient several times, and had a little house near Toulon filled with souvenirs of his travels. I knew he was a composer and that he had written a bizarre opera based upon a Chinese story. I knew also, though vaguely, that he had a name in the world of sports for having broken several motor speed records, and that he had been one of the first naval officers to make a flight in a hydroplane.

A man in love is an extremely sensitive reagent for the feelings of the woman he loves. From where I sat I could not see Odile, who was at the other end of the table, on the same side. But I knew how her face looked at that moment, and with what lively interest she was listening to François' tales. I remember this dinner clearly. I felt like a father who loves his only daughter above everything, and who discovers that he has brought her, through inevitable and unfortunate circumstances, into an environment contaminated by a horrible epidemic; and who tries desperately to save her from the contagion. If I only could prevent Odile, after dinner, from finding herself in the same group as François; keep her from hearing from any one the details of his life, which I knew would excite her interest! Then I should be able to get her away at midnight, without having come in contact with the most virulent of microbes.

Luck was with me, not through any clever maneuver

on my part, but because immediately after dinner, François was monopolized by Hélène de Thianges, who took him to the Chinese room, which Aunt Cora always reserved for couples who wanted to be alone. In the meantime I had a curious talk about François with Yvonne Prévost, a pretty woman whose husband was also in the navy, a captain and coadjutor of the admiral at headquarters.

"Crozant interests you?" she asked. "I saw a great deal of him at Toulon where I spent my girlhood; father was Naval Director there, you know. I remember that men always thought Crozant insincere, some even went so far as to say he was disloyal, but every woman was crazy about him. . . . I was too young at the time, but I heard what they said about him."

"Tell me; I am interested."

"I don't remember it all very well; I believe he was quite a Don Juan; he would seem to care passionately for a woman, pay assiduous court to her, overwhelm her with letters and flowers, then suddenly drop her and take up with another, without giving the first one the slightest clue to what it was that prompted the change. He imposed strict discipline upon himself. To keep himself fit, he would go to bed at ten every night. They used to say that he would turn the most beautiful woman out of his house as soon as ten o'clock struck. . . . He was hard, and cruel in love, and he pretended to believe that it was nothing more than a game quite as unimportant to others as to himself. You can im-

agine the havoc such an attitude caused amongst the women."

"Rather. But why did women love him?"

"That . . . you know . . . for instance, I have a friend who loved him ardently; she said to me, 'It was horrible, but for a long time I could not help loving him. He was so fascinating, winning, exacting, sometimes dour and cruel, but at times, tender and beseeching. It took me months to realize that he would bring me nothing but sorrow.'"

"Did she get over it, this friend?"

"Yes, quite; she laughs now when she speaks of it."

"And you believe that at present he is trying his charms on Hélène de Thianges?"

"Undoubtedly, but this time, he has met an opponent who is his superior. However, a woman like her, young as she is and as prominent socially, will have to be careful. François wrecks the lives of the women who cross his path, because he cannot resist talking about his conquests to the whole world. In Toulon, whenever he had won a new victory, the whole town knew it the next day."

"But he is detestable."

"Oh no," she said, "he has a great deal of charm; only he is like that. . . ."

Generally, we create our own misery. I was farsighted when I promised myself not to speak to Odile about François. Why was I not able to keep from relating this conversation to her on the way home? I

think it was because I could not resist the thrill of interesting Odile, of seeing her give keen attention to what I was saying. Possibly also, I had a hope, vain as it was, that such severe judgment of François might somehow set Odile against him.

"And you say he is a composer?" she said when I had finished.

Imprudently, I had evoked the demon. It was no longer in my power to drive him away. I had to pass the remainder of the evening telling her all I knew of him and of his strange mode of living.

"It would be fun to know him. Don't you think we might have him for dinner one night?" said Odile indifferently enough.

"Yes, of course, if you like, if we ever see him again, but probably he will soon be off for Toulon. Did you like him?"

"No, I don't like the way he has of looking at women, just as though he could see right through them."

A fortnight later, we met him again at Aunt Cora's. I asked him if he had left the navy.

"No," he said brusquely and nearly insolently, "I have been transferred for six months to the Hydrographic Department."

This time, he had a long conversation with Odile. I can see them now, sitting together on a tapestry sofa, leaning toward one another, and talking earnestly.

On our way home, Odile was silent.

"Well, dear," said I, "and my sailor man, how did you like him?"

"He is interesting," said Odile to me, and then not another word.

12.

On several successive Tuesdays, at Aunt Cora's, François and Odile sought refuge in the Chinese salon, the moment we got up from table. Naturally, I suffered frightfully, but I was determined to keep myself in hand so that no one might divine what was going on within me. But I could not refrain from discussing François with women. I hoped to hear from them that they found him mediocre, in order that I might repeat it to Odile. But strangely enough, they all admired him. Even the level-headed Hélène de Thianges, called Minerva by Odile because of her wisdom, said to me,

"Yes, I assure you he is most seductive."

"In what way? I try to be interested in what he says, but it is hard sledding; it seems to me that it is always the same thing. He speaks of Indo-China, of colonization, of the 'intense' life of Gauguin. . . . The first time I heard him talk I thought he was quite remarkable. But soon I realized that it was all stereotyped. If you've heard it once, that's quite enough."

"Yes, perhaps that's true; in a measure you are right. But he tells such lovely stories. Women are just like children, Marcenat. They never lose their keenness

for fairy tales. And then the framework of real life is so limited for them, that they wish to escape from it constantly. If you only knew how tiresome it is to busy yourself day after day with housekeeping, shopping, guests, children. The married man, or the Parisian bachelor is a part of this domestic and social machinery, and brings nothing new, nothing fresh into it; while a sailor, like Crozant, comes to us with things so entirely different from this grinding daily routine that he attracts us."

"But, as a matter of fact, don't you realize that what makes this attitude of Crozant unbearable is its faked romanticism? You speak of his stories . . . personally, I hate them . . . he makes them up, that's obvious."

"Which ones do you mean?"

"You know very well; for instance that one about the English girl in Honolulu who, hearing he was going away, threw herself into the sea; and that one about the Russian who sent him her photograph in a frame made from her hair. I find this sort of story in the worst possible taste. . . ."

"I never heard him tell those stories. . . . Who told you about them, Odile?"

"Not at all. I heard them on many sides. Why should you think it was Odile, particularly? Tell me, frankly, don't you think stories like those are not only shocking but disgusting?"

"I daresay they are. But just the same he has eyes

that one never forgets, and then what you say is not exactly true. You see him more or less in the light of gossip. But talk to him and you will find he is quite simple."

One met Admiral Garnier very frequently at my aunt's. One evening, I managed to be alone with him, and I questioned him about Crozant.

"Ah," said he, "there's a real sailor. . . . He is one of the big men of the future. . . ."

Then and there, I determined to fight this feeling of repulsion which François de Crozant inspired in me, to see more of him, to seek him out and to attempt to judge him impartially. I found it very difficult. When I had first met him, at Halff's house, he had shown such disdain of me that I had never been able to rid myself of that first disagreeable impression. He seemed now to make an effort to overcome the antipathy which my hostile and surly silence inspired in him. But I thought, and perhaps I was right, that I interested him because of Odile. This did not tend to make him more attractive to me; quite the contrary.

I invited him to dinner. I was determined to find him interesting; but it was impossible. He was intelligent but fundamentally timid, and he attempted to conceal this timidity by affecting an authoritative self-assurance which exasperated me. He seemed to me much less remarkable than my old friends André and Bertrand, and I could not understand why Odile had contemptuously put them in the discard, while she

found such fascination in François de Crozant. From the moment he entered the house, she was a different person and she seemed more beautiful than ever. One day François and I discussed love in her presence. I believe I said that the only thing which could make of love a most beautiful passion was faithfulness, faithfulness despite anything and unto death. Suddenly, Odile gave François a look which I found very disturbing.

"I don't see at all the importance of fidelity in love," he said with that Admirable Crichton air which always gave an abstract and dictatorial tang to his ideas. "One must live in the present. The vital thing is to extract from every moment all its potential and actual possibilities. Power, danger, desire, will do it. But why try to keep alive by fidelity a desire that is dying, or attempt to revive one that is dead?"

"Because true intensity is to be found only in the lasting and in the difficult. Don't you recall that part of Rousseau's *Confessions* in which he said that to touch the dress of a chaste woman gives more pleasure than to possess a wayward one?"

"Rousseau was a sick soul," said François.

"I hate Rousseau," said Odile.

Feeling them united against me, I began with awkward vehemence to defend Rousseau who, in reality, had never meant anything to me. We realized, then, all three of us, that from that time on, there could be no topic of discussion which would not become, be-

neath transparent masks, confidential and dangerous.

Several times, when François spoke to me of his profession, I became so keenly interested that I forgot for a while my hostility toward him. When, after dinner, walking through the salon with swinging sailor gait, he would begin, "Marcenat, do you know how I spent yesterday evening? Reading Admiral Mahan's *Nelson's Battles.*" For a moment I would feel, despite myself, the pleasure I used to have in former days when Halff or Bertrand visited me.

"Really?" said I. "Do you do it for pleasure or because you think it may be of service to you? Naval tactics must have changed fundamentally since the days of Nelson. All this talk of tacking, favorable winds, jockeying to launch a broadside, etc., has all that any value nowadays?"

"No doubt about it," said François, "the qualities that make for victory, on land or on sea, are the same to-day as they were in the time of Hannibal or Cæsar. Take Aboukir, for example, what was it that made the English victorious? First of all, Nelson's tenaciousness. Having searched the entire Mediterranean for the French fleet, and failing to find it, he did not abandon the pursuit; then the promptness of his decision when he found the enemy at anchor and the wind favorable. Those fundamental qualities, tenacity, audacity, do you believe they cease to be essential now the dreadnought has replaced the *Victory?* Not a bit of it.

And then the essentials of strategy are immutable. Take, for instance . . ."

He put a piece of paper upon the table and drew a pencil from his pocket.

"Here are the two fleets. The arrow shows the direction of the wind. These little shaded lines are shoals. . . ." I leaned over his shoulder. Odile was sitting at the same table, her hands clasped under her chin. She admired François; now and then she looked at me from beneath her eyelashes.

"Would she listen to me like that," I wondered, "if I were telling the story of battles."

Another thing that struck me in the course of the visits that François de Crozant paid us was that frequently Odile would be brilliant, relating incidents or expressing ideas that I had imparted to her when we were engaged to be married. She had never since mentioned them to me, and I thought she had forgotten them. And now, here was my little storehouse of knowledge, dusted and displayed to impress another man with the striking masculinity of the feminine mind. While listening to her, I thought it was a repetition of the Denise Aubry episode, and that not infrequently when we take great pains to shape a soul, we are in reality working for another.

The strange thing is that the beginning of their real *liaison* probably coincides with a short period of comparative peace of mind for me. François and Odile, who for several weeks had rather compromised them-

selves, not only in my eyes but in those of our friends, now displayed astonishing prudence; they rarely let themselves be seen together and were never in the same group in a drawing-room. She never spoke of him, and if by chance another woman mentioned his name in her presence, she replied with such consummate carelessness that even I was taken in for quite a long time. But, unfortunately, as Odile said, in anything that concerned her, I had diabolic intuition, and it was not long before I unmasked the attitude they had assumed.

It must be, I thought, because they have such absolute freedom to say and to do what they like when beyond my eyes that they have nothing to say to one another in the evening, and so they avoid each other and pretend to have no mutual interest.

I had developed the habit of analyzing with astonishing accuracy everything Odile said, and I could see François concealed in all her remarks. Through Dr. Pozzi, François had become a friend of Anatole France and he went to Villa Saïd every Sunday morning. It was no secret to me. For several weeks, Odile told most interesting and intimate anecdotes about France. One evening, as we were leaving the Thianges' house, where we had dined and where she, as a rule silent and retiring, had astonished our friends by commenting with much gusto upon Anatole France's political ideas, I said to her,

"Dearest, how brilliant you were to-night! Why

don't you ever talk to me like that, and where did you learn it all?"

"I? Brilliant?" she was pleased and disturbed, "was I brilliant? I was not aware of it."

"It's no crime, Odile. Don't defend yourself. Every one thought you were remarkably intelligent. . . . Where did you learn all this? That's what I want to know."

"I don't know myself. It must have been the other day at tea, some one who knew Anatole France."

"But who?"

"I have forgotten. I did not pay much attention."

Poor Odile! How clumsy she was! She tried to keep her customary tone and say nothing that would give her away, but she could not keep her new love from seeping through everything she uttered. She reminded me of a flooded meadow, intact in appearance, whose grass stands straight and green, but every step one takes in it reveals the treacherous water which covers its surface. She was so determined to avoid direct indications, that is, mention of François' name, that she was unaware of the indirect ones which made his name as luminous to all eyes as it would have been on a billboard illuminated by electric lights. For me, familiar as I was with Odile's tastes and ideas, it was interesting though painful to notice the rapid changes that were taking place in her. Though she had never been very religious, she had always practiced her religion and went to church every Sunday. But now, "I am a Greek

of the fourth century, B.C., and a pagan," she said. In that sentence, I could hear François as distinctly as though he had uttered it. Then she would say, "What is life? Forty miserable years which we spend on a lump of mud . . . and you think we should waste a moment of it by being bored?" "François' philosophy," I thought, "and ordinary at that." Sometimes, I needed a moment's thought to establish a connection between a certain unusual interest and the real object of her thought. For instance, she who never read a newspaper would see a headline, "Forest Fires in the South," and instantly take the paper from my hand.

"Are you interested in forest fires, Odile?"

"No," she would say, giving the paper back to me. "Only I wanted to know where in the south the fire was."

Then, I remembered the little house which François owned, in the midst of a pine forest, at Beauvallon.

There was something pathetic about Odile with all her naïve precautions. One had to smile at her, as one smiles at a child who thinks he is hiding something by putting it on the carpet, in the middle of a room. When she repeated something she had heard from friend or family, she always quoted the source. When it was François, she would say, "Some one . . . I have been told . . . a person recently told me. . . ." At times, she displayed astonishing familiarity with naval terms and happenings. She knew that a new type of cruiser was being built, a new type of submarine was being

studied, that the English fleet was planning a cruise to Toulon. People were amazed.

"That's funny. I did not see anything about it in the newspaper."

And, frightened, realizing she had talked too much, she would say,

"After all, I don't know. . . . It may not be so at all."

But it always was so.

She patterned her language after François'. His vocabulary, which had made me say to Hélène de Thianges that he talked as though he were reciting a piece, had become Odile's. She spoke of the "intense" life; of the trials of colonizing; of the thrills of Indo-China. The inflexible theories of François, passing through the cloudy mind of Odile, lost their angles. I could follow these theories through her very readily but when I saw them, they had lost their shape, just as a river flowing through a lake loses its outline and becomes an indefinite shadow, constantly broken and enveloped by little waves.

13.

Everything served to show that even if Odile was not François' mistress, at least she saw him secretly, and yet I could not nerve myself to have it out with her. What was the use? I might show Odile all the details that I had gathered, all the verbal coincidences that my

pitiless memory had retained. She would laugh, look tenderly at me and say, "How amusing you are," and what could I answer? Could I threaten her? Did I want a separation? And might I not, despite appearances, be mistaken? When I was sincere with myself I knew very well I was not mistaken; and then life would become unbearable, and for a few days I would cling to any hypothesis, no matter how unlikely it was.

I was profoundly miserable. Odile's conduct, and what was going on in her mind, had become an obsession and I could not free myself from it. I could not do any work; in my office I spent most of my time, head in hands, cogitating and planning; at night, I would not sleep until three or four in the morning, so absorbed was my mind with solving a problem whose solution was only too obvious.

Summer came. François' work in Paris was finished, and he went back to Toulon. Odile seemed very calm, not at all disturbed by his departure and in this I found some comfort. I did not know whether or not he wrote to her. In any case, I never saw any letter from him. I noticed, too, that the characteristics of Odile's conversation that distressed me had become less evident.

I was not able to take my holiday until August, because my father took a cure at Vichy in July, but as Odile's health during most of the winter had been indifferent, we had decided that she should spend July in Trouville, at Villa Choin. A fortnight before it was time for her to go she said to me,

"If you don't mind, I should prefer not to go to Aunt Cora's, but to a quieter place. I hate Normandy. It's too full of people . . . and her house particularly. . . ."

"What's that, Odile? Do I hear you say you don't like people, you who always say I don't like them enough?"

"Well, it depends upon one's frame of mind, doesn't it? Just now I feel a great desire for calm and solitude. . . . Don't you think I could find a little place in Brittany? I have never been there and every one says it is so beautiful."

"It is certainly beautiful, dear, but it is very far. I'd never be able to spend Sunday with you, as I could easily in Trouville. And then in Trouville you'd have the villa all to yourself; Aunt Cora is not planning to go there until the first of August. Why change all the plans now?"

But evidently she was bent on going to Brittany, and persistently though sweetly insisted until I finally yielded. I could not understand that move. It seemed to me she would have tried to go nearer Toulon; that would have been easy because the summer that year had been horrible, and every one said Normandy was far too damp and rainy for enjoyment. Although I was very sad when she left, it gave me a certain pleasure to think that she was going away from danger. I took her to the train, somewhat depressed. She had been

particularly affectionate that day. On the station platform, she kissed me.

"Have a good time, Dickie. . . . Don't be lonesome; go out with Misa if you wish, she'll love it. . . ."

"But Misa is at Gandumas."

"No, she'll be at her mother's here all next week."

"When you're not here, I have no desire to go out. I stay home alone and get blue. . . ."

"You mustn't," she said, tapping my cheek maternally. "I don't deserve such fidelity, I am not interesting. You take life too seriously, Dickie . . . after all, it is only a game. . . ."

"It's an amusing game. . . ."

"No," she replied with a shade of sadness, "it is not. And, besides, it is very hard to play. One does so many things that one does not really want to do. I think it's time for me to take my seat . . . good-by, Dickie. . . . Happy?"

She kissed me again, sent me from the window one of those divine smiles that bound me to her, and disappeared immediately into the compartment. She hated long good-bys and indeed everything that made for display of sentiment. Later, Misa told me she was hard; that was not quite true. On the contrary, she was capable of great generosity and much kindness, but she was moved by very strong impulses, and because she was afraid that out of pity she might be led to do things she did not want to do, she rarely let herself go. It was when she was keeping herself

firmly in hand that her face took on the hard and somewhat impervious expression that deprived it of beauty.

## 14.

The day following her departure was Tuesday and I dined at Aunt Cora's. She entertained as late as August but less formally in the summer. I happened to be seated next to Admiral Garnier. We spoke of the weather, of a storm which in the late afternoon had broken over Paris, and he said,

"By the way, I have just found a good job for your friend François de Crozant. He was keen to study the coast of Brittany, and I found a temporary position for him at Brest."

"Brest?"

The glasses and the flowers on the table began to swim before me. I thought I was going to faint. But the social instinct has been so developed in us that I believe we would be capable of dying while pretending it did not matter.

"Really? I had not heard of it. How long ago?"

"Just a few days."

I kept up a long conversation with him on the harbor of Brest and its value as a naval base, on its old houses, on Vauban. My thoughts were running on two diametrically opposed planes. From the surface, came the banal and polite words which conveyed to the Admiral the impression that I was a calm human being,

happy that the evening was cool and that the lowering clouds had disappeared. From the depths, there came a low, indistinct voice which said, "That's why Odile insisted on going to Brittany." I could picture her walking by his side through the streets of Brest, leaning on his arm, looking up into his face with that expression which I knew and loved so well. Perhaps she would stay with him one evening. Morgat, the place she had chosen, was not far from Brest. Perhaps it was François who would meet her by the seaside. Surely, he had a motor boat. They would walk along the cliffs. I knew how attractive Odile could make nature look during such walks. The amazing thought that struck me then was that, though I was in agony, nevertheless I got a keen, intellectual pleasure from finally having found out why she insisted upon going to Brittany. This time the solution of these horrible problems which always confronted me when Odile's actions were concerned had come to me with astonishing swiftness, as soon as she had mentioned Brittany. "François is there," I had thought. And now I knew he was there. My heart was broken, but my mind was pleased.

I spent most of the night debating what I should do. Take a train for Brittany? The chances were that when I reached the little beach, I should find Odile content and alone. I would appear insane, and it would not even comfort me to find her alone, for I should immediately think that François had come and

gone which would not be unlikely. The horrible thing about a feeling such as mine is that there is no cure for it. Any fact can be interpreted in an unfavorable light. For the first time in my life I thought seriously, "Shall I have to separate from Odile? Since her nature and mine are as they are, I shall never have peace. Since she has never done anything, and never will do anything to spare me, would it not be better for us to live apart? We have no children. Divorce would be easy." I recall the state of negative happiness in which I lived before I met her. Although in those days my life was neither exciting nor constructive, it was simple and comfortable; but while maturing this plan I knew well that I did not want it effected, for the thought of living without Odile was inconceivable.

I turned over in bed. I tried to go to sleep. I counted a flock of sheep as they went through a gate; I pictured a dull, drowsy landscape, but everything is in vain when the mind is obsessed. At times, I was angry with myself and would say, "Why love her rather than another woman? She is beautiful, of course, but other women are beautiful, too, and more intelligent. Odile has serious faults. She does not tell the truth and that's the thing I loathe most in the world. Then what? Can't I rid myself, shake off this hold she has on me?" I repeated over and over to myself, "I don't love her, I don't love her, I don't love her," but in my heart I knew I loved her as much as ever, though I was unable to understand why.

Then I would reproach myself for having allowed her to go, but could I have prevented it? She seemed to be dominated by a fatal and powerful urge. Fleeting images of heroines of antiquity crossed my mind. I felt that she regretted what she was doing but that she could not do otherwise. Had I lain across the rails that evening, she would have ridden over my body with merciless pity, to join François.

Toward morning, I tried to persuade myself that this coincidence really proved nothing and that perhaps Odile did not even know that François was in the vicinity. But I knew too that that was not true. I went to sleep at dawn and dreamed that I was walking in the street near the Palais-Bourbon. The street was lighted by a lamp on an old-fashioned post and I saw a man in front of me, walking quickly. I recognized François' back, took a revolver from my pocket and fired. He fell. I felt relieved and ashamed. I woke up. Two days later, I received a letter from Odile.

"The weather is perfect; the cliffs are lovely; I met an old lady in the hotel here who knows you; her name is Jouhan; she lives near Gandumas. I swim every day; the water is nice and warm. I took some trips around this part of the country. I love Brittany. I went out sailing. I hope you are not unhappy. Are you having a good time? Did you dine at Aunt Cora's Tuesday? Have you seen Misa?" And it ended, "I love you and I send you many kisses, my dear."

The handwriting was larger than usual. One could see she had made an effort to fill four pages so as not to hurt me, but that she found it hard to do. She was in a hurry, I thought; perhaps he was waiting for her and she had said to him, "I've got to write to my husband," and, picturing her as she must have said these words, I could not help finding her beautiful, and all I wished for was her return.

## 15.

About a week after Odile had left, Misa telephoned me. "I know you're alone. I know Odile is away. I am alone, too. I came back to stay with my people because I had some shopping to do here, and also because I wanted to have a breath of Paris air. Just now the family are all away and I have the apartment to myself. Come and see me, won't you?"

I thought that perhaps, talking to Misa, I might forget some of the painful and futile thoughts which were so upsetting to me and I made an engagement with her for that very evening. She opened the door herself; the servants were out. She looked lovely in a tea gown of pink crêpe de chine which she had copied from one of Odile's. I noticed that she wore her hair like Odile now. The weather had turned cold after a storm; she had lit a fire in the grate and she sat in front of it, on a heap of cushions. I sat beside her and we talked of our

families, of the vile weather, of Gandumas, of her husband, of Odile.

"Have you heard from her? She has not written me a line, and I think it is very nasty of her."

I told her I had received two letters.

"Has she met any one congenial? Has she been to Brest?"

"No, I think not? Brest is quite far from where she is staying."

The question seemed strange to me. Misa wore a blue and green bracelet made of glass beads. I told her it was pretty and I seized her wrist to look at it more closely. She leaned toward me. I put my arm around her waist and she did not resist. I felt she had nothing much on under this pink gown. She looked at me anxiously, solicitously. I bent over her, kissed her, and felt beneath my chest, as I had on the day we had wrestled, the double firm outline of her bosom. She leaned backward and there, on those cushions, she yielded herself to me. I had no feeling of love for her, but I had desired her and I had said to myself, "If I don't, I'll look like a coward."

We soon found ourselves sitting again before the fire, her hand in mine. She looked at me with a happy, triumphant expression. I felt sad; I wanted to die.

"What are you thinking about?"

"At that moment I was thinking about poor Odile."

She flared up and frowned.

"Look here, I love you, and from now on I don't want to hear you say ridiculous things."

"Ridiculous? How so?"

She hesitated for quite a while and then said, while eying me closely,

"Don't you really understand, or are you pretending not to understand?"

I knew everything she was going to say and I knew that I ought to stop her, but at the same time I was curious to know.

"No, I am not pretending, I really don't understand."

"Ah . . . I thought you knew, but that you loved Odile too much to leave her, or even to mention it to her. Many times, I felt I ought to tell you about it, but as I was Odile's friend, it was very difficult for me. . . . Now that I love you a thousand times more than I love her . . ."

Then she told me that Odile had been François' mistress for upward of six months and that she, Misa, had often been asked to transmit his letters, so that envelopes with the Toulon postmark would not attract my attention.

"You can imagine how distressing that was for me when I loved you so. . . . You did not know that I had loved you these last three years? How stupid men are! However, things are all right now. You'll see that I shall make you very happy; you deserve it

and I have such tremendous admiration for you . . . you are a wonderful person."

She overwhelmed me with flatteries; they gave me no pleasure, I simply thought how false it all was. "There is nothing wonderful about me . . . I can't live without Odile . . . what am I doing here? Why have I my arm around this woman's waist?" For we were still sitting side by side like happy lovers and I hated her.

"Misa, how could you betray Odile's confidence? It is abominable what you are doing."

She looked at me dumbfounded.

"Well, that's beyond anything I have ever heard. The idea of your taking her part, now. . . ."

"Yes, I don't approve at all of what you've done . . . even though you did it for me. Odile is your friend."

"She was. I don't like her any more."

"Since when?"

"Since I fell in love with you."

"But I don't want you to love me. I love Odile just as she is" (and saying this I gave Misa a challenging look—she shivered). "When I try to understand why I love Odile, I can't possibly reason it out. I think it is because she has never bored me. For me, she is life and happiness."

She said, bitterly, "You are a queer duck!"

"Possibly I am."

She thought a moment, then put her head on my

shoulder and said to me, with a passion that should have touched me had I been less in love and less blind,

"I love you, and I shall make you happy despite yourself. . . . I shall be faithful and devoted. Julian is at Gandumas; he leaves me quite alone. You may if you wish see me down there, too. He is away at Guichardie two days a week. You've lost the habit of happiness, but you'll see. I'll give it back to you."

"Thank you very much," I said coldly; "I am quite happy."

This scene lasted far into the night. We assumed the attitudes and made the gestures of love, but I felt welling up within me an incomprehensible and savage anger against her. However, when we separated, we kissed tenderly.

I swore to myself I would never see her again, but despite my vow I went to her often in Odile's absence. She was incredibly imprudent and often yielded to my embraces in her parents' living room. A servant might have entered at any moment. I would remain with her until two or three in the morning; we were silent most of the time.

"What are you thinking about?" she would ask me constantly with a smile that tried to be irresistible.

I would be thinking, "How disloyal you are to Odile," but I would answer, "I am thinking of you."

Now that I revive these memories without emotion, I see clearly that Misa was not a bad woman, but at that time, I judged her harshly.

16.

At last, Odile came back. I met her at the station. I promised myself that I would not say a word to her. I knew very well how such talk would end. I would reproach her, she would deny; I would tell her what Misa had said, and she would say that Misa was a liar. But I would know that Misa had told the truth. It would all be in vain. Walking up and down the platform of the station, the air laden with the smell of oil and burning coal, surrounded by strangers, I kept saying to myself, "Since I am happy only when I am with her, and since I know well I shall never break with her, it is much better to enjoy that happiness and to avoid irritating her." The next minute I said to myself, "How cowardly! All that it would require is a week's determination either to change her or to get along without her."

A man hung up a sign: "Brest Express arriving on track No. 5." I stood still.

"After all," I said to myself, "it is too stupid. Suppose that in May, 1909, you had gone to some other hotel in Florence. All your life you would have been ignorant of the existence of Odile Malet. You would have lived just the same and probably you would have been happy. Why not begin all over, at this very moment, and pretend that she does not exist?"

At that moment, I saw in the distance the headlights

of a locomotive, then the outline of the approaching train. It all seemed unreal. I could not picture Odile at all. I walked along the platform. I saw heads leaning out of the car windows. Some men jumped from the train before it had come to a full stop. Then a crowd gathered on the platform; porters pushed their trucks around. Suddenly, I saw Odile's figure in the distance and a few seconds later she was by my side, with a porter who carried her gray bag. She looked well and I saw that she was happy.

As she got into the car, she said to me,

"Dickie, let's stop somewhere and buy a bottle of champagne and some caviar, and have a little supper just as we did the day we returned from our wedding trip."

This may seem the grossest hypocrisy. But you would have to know Odile before judging her. She had, doubtless, enjoyed to the utmost the few days she had spent with François; she was ready to make the present moment happy, and to make it as pleasant for me as she could. She saw that I was depressed and did not smile at her. She said to me, with an air of despair,

"What's the matter now, Dickie?"

My resolutions to be silent were never very firm; in her presence I permitted the thought that I wanted to hide, to escape.

"Some one told me François was in Brest."

"Who told you that?"

"Admiral Garnier."

"That François was in Brest? What about it? Why should it worry you?"

"It worries me that he was near Morgat and that it was easy for him to go to see you."

"Very easy; so much so indeed that, if you want to know it, he did come to see me. Do you mind?"

"You never wrote me that he did."

"Are you sure I did not? I thought I did. . . . In any case, if I did not write it, it was possibly because I thought it was of no importance, nor is it."

"Well, I don't feel that way about it. I was also told that you carried on a secret correspondence with him."

This seemed to have an effect upon Odile and to make her somewhat panicky. I had never seen that expression on her face before.

"Who told you that?"

"Misa."

"Misa! Well, she lied. Did she show you any of the letters?"

"No, but why should she make up any such tales?"

"I can't imagine . . . jealousy, I suppose."

"Tell it to the marines, Odile."

We reached the house. Odile had a welcoming and charming smile for the servants. She went to her room, took off her hat, arranged her hair in front of the mirror and seeing me behind her with eyes glued to her reflected image, smiled at me also.

"What a queer Dickie you are! I can't leave you

alone eight days that the blue devils don't get you. . . . You are ungrateful, my dear. I thought of you all the time I was away, and I am going to prove it to you. Hand me my bag, will you?"

She opened it and took a small package from it which she gave to me. It contained two books, *Les Rêveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire*, and the *Chartreuse de Parme*, both original editions.

"Oh . . . Odile . . . thanks; they are lovely. Where did you find them?"

"I rummaged the bookshops of Brest, my dear. I wanted to bring you something."

"You did go to Brest, then?"

"Of course; it was quite near and there was steamer service. I have been wanting to see Brest for ten years. . . . Aren't you going to kiss me for my little present? And I hoped you would like it so much . . . I worked hard to get them, you know . . . they are very rare, Dickie. You can't imagine how many little savings they represent."

Then I kissed her. The sentiments I experienced in her presence were so complex that they were beyond my understanding. I detested her and I adored her at the same time. I believed her both innocent and guilty. The scene of violence that I had planned turned into a friendly conversation. We talked the entire evening of Misa's betrayal, as though things she had told me (and which were doubtless true) had concerned not

Odile and myself, but some friendly couple whose happiness we wanted to safeguard.

"I sincerely hope," Odile said, "you will never see her again."

I promised I would not.

I never knew what transpired the next day between Odile and Misa. Did they have it out on the telephone? Did Odile go to Misa's house? The thing I know is that she was final and brutal. Odile could be that—this relentless determination was part of her rage—and, perhaps because I was reserved and taciturn by nature and education, this trait in her charmed and shocked me. As for myself, I never saw Misa after that; I never heard her name mentioned and the recollection that I have of this brief *liaison* is similar to that left by a dream.

17.

When suspicion enters the mind, it destroys love not by one blow but by a series of explosions like those of a submarine torpedo. The evening that Odile returned, her sweetness, her manner, the pleasure of seeing her again, delayed the catastrophe, but from that moment on she and I lived in a mined zone and we were in danger of being blown up any day. I could no longer speak to Odile, even when I loved her most, without a shade of bitterness in my words, slight though it was. Reproaches, not framed in words, were felt in the most commonplace phrases, like fleecy, distant

clouds. The philosophic optimism and gayety of the first months of our marriage had been succeeded by melancholy pessimism. Nature, which I had loved so much when Odile revealed it to me, sang to me now in sad motives, in minor keys. Even the beauty of Odile was no longer perfect, and I occasionally detected indications of treachery in her features. They were fleeting; five minutes later, I saw her smooth forehead, her frank eyes and I loved her anew.

Early in August, we left for Gandumas. Solitude, isolation, freedom from letters and from telephone calls straightened me out and I had a few weeks of respite; the trees, the meadows shimmering in the sun, the somber hills studded with fir trees had a marked effect upon Odile. The pleasure that Nature gave her had a sensuous quality which was conveyed to a companion, even though the companion was myself. The solitude of two persons, not carried to satiety or boredom, permits a steady sentimental growth and develops a confidence which tends to unite those who enjoy it together. I felt that Odile was saying to herself, "After all, Dickie is very nice," and this feeling drew her very close to me.

I recall one evening, particularly. We were alone on the terrace from which one could see a vast horizon of hills and forests. Even at this moment I see with great distinctness the briar heath on the hillside in front of us. The sun was setting; everything was very quiet, and soft. All human affairs appeared so trifling.

Without thought, I said a thousand tender and caressing things to Odile, and strangely enough they were things that a man resigned to losing her might say.

"We could have had such a perfect life, Odile. . . . I have loved you so much. . . . Don't you remember Florence and the time when I could not stop looking at you for even one minute? . . . I am ready to be like that again, dearest. . . ."

"If you only know the joy it gives me to hear you say those things. . . . I too have loved you passionately. How I have believed in you! I used to say to mother, 'I have found the man who will hold me . . . forever.' If only I had not found out my mistake. . . ."

"Was it my fault? . . . Why didn't you talk it over with me . . . ?"

"You know why, Dickie . . . I did not because it was not possible. Because you had me on a pedestal. Don't you see, Dickie, that your great fault has been that you demand too much of women? You expect too much of them, more than they are capable of giving . . . but just the same I am content in the thought that you will be sorry when I am no longer here. . . ."

This she said in a tone of painful prophecy which made a deep impression upon me.

"But you will always be here," I said.

"You know very well I shan't," she said.

At that moment, my parents arrived.

Often, during this holiday, I took Odile to my observatory, where we would stay a long time looking at the miniature torrent at the bottom of the funnel-shaped woody glen. She loved this place. She spoke of her youth, of Florence, of our dreams on the Thames. I clasped her in my arms without protest on her part. She seemed happy. "Why not pretend," I thought, "that we can begin our lives anew and that for each one the past needs be but a dream? Am I, at this moment, the man who in this same place used to embrace Denise Aubry? Is it not possible that Odile has quite forgotten François since she has been here?" But all the time I was trying to reconstruct my happiness at any cost. I knew that it was not real, and I knew, too, that the beatific dreamy expression that came into Odile's face as she leaned on the window at my side probably had its origin in the thought that François loved her.

There was another person at Gandumas who saw with extraordinary clarity what was going on in my household: my mother. I said to you before that she never had much affection for Odile, but she was kind and she saw how deeply I loved her so she never gave way to her feelings in the matter. The day before we left, I met her in the garden and she asked me if I would like to take a walk with her. I looked at my watch. As Odile would not be ready for some time, I said,

"Yes, I'd love to go down toward the valley. I

haven't been there with you since I was twelve or thirteen."

This recollection touched her, and she became more confidential than was her custom. She spoke of my father's health; he had arteriosclerosis and the doctor was quite concerned about him; then, with her eyes on the pebbles of the footpath she said,

"What's happened between you and Misa?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because you have not been to see them once since you have been here. Last week, I asked them to dinner and she declined, a thing she had never done before. Of course, I can see something has happened."

"Well, Mother, there is something, but I'd rather not tell you about it. Misa has not played fair with Odile."

She walked on for a while, silently, then she said in a low voice, as though reluctantly,

"Are you certain that Odile played fair with Misa? Let me tell you something. I don't wish to interfere between your wife and you, but I must say to you at least this once that every one blames you, even your father; you have been too indulgent with her. You know how I despise gossip, and I want to believe that what I heard is gossip, but if it is, you ought to insist that she live with you in such a way that people can't say things about her."

I listened to her, while striking at the grasses with my stick. I knew she was right. She had kept this to

herself, for a long time; I thought also that perhaps Misa had spoken to her and told her the whole story. They had developed quite an intimacy since Misa had been living in Gandumas, and mother was fond of her. Yes, surely she knew the truth. But listening to this attack on Odile, this deserved though indulgent attack, my reaction was that of the knight-errant and I was emphatic in my defense of my wife. Talking to my mother I displayed a confidence in Odile that I was far from feeling, and I endowed her with virtues that I knew she did not possess.

Love creates strange solidarity. It seemed to me that morning that it was my duty to side with Odile and make a common defense against truth. Perhaps there entered into this attitude a desire to convince myself that she loved me still. I told mother everything that would prove how attached Odile was to me, the two books she had found after such long search at Brest, the sweetness of her letters, her conduct since we had been at Gandumas. My mother's convictions were, I believed, somewhat shaken by the ardor of my defense; mine were not, unfortunately, they were too well entrenched.

I never mentioned this conversation to Odile.

## 18.

As soon as we returned to Paris, François' shadow appeared again, imperceptible but constantly present,

darkening our life. Since her quarrel with Misa, I did not know how Odile communicated with him. I still do not know, but I observed that Odile always ran to the telephone as soon as the bell rang, as though she feared I might intercept a message which was intended for her. All the books she read were about the sea, and pictures of waves and of boats, even though mediocre, threw her into a sort of sensuous revery. One evening a telegram came for her. She opened it, read it, and said, as she tore it into bits, "It's nothing."

"What do you mean nothing, Odile? What is it?"

"A dress that won't be ready when it was promised," she said.

Admiral Garnier, whom I had asked, told me that François was in Brest. This should have given me some tranquillity, but it did not. And I was justified in feeling uneasy.

Occasionally, still, under the influence of stirring music or of a mellow autumn evening, we enjoyed fleeting moments of passion.

"Suppose you should tell me the truth, darling, the whole truth about the past . . . I would try to forget, and we could start again, confidently, on a new life, perfectly clear."

She would shake her head, with no bitterness, with no rancor, with something like despair. She no longer denied the past; nor had she ever admitted it, but the admission was tacit, implicit.

"No, Dickie, I can't. I know it is useless. It all

seems so mixed up and confused now . . . I'll never have the strength to put it all in order. . . . And then, I could not tell you why I did this or that . . . I have forgotten. . . . No, it is hopeless, I give up."

Almost invariably these tender talks ended in bitterness and anger. A word from her would astonish me; I would become stubborn and refuse to listen to her; the fatal question would rise to my lips, I would hold it back for a while but as it smothered me, I had to let it escape. When she could, Odile always tried to make light of the scene, but when she saw that I was serious, she would grow angry.

"Really," she would say, "an evening alone with you is worse than a Chinese torture. I'd rather go away. If I stay here I shall become insane. . . ."

Suddenly, the fear of losing her would quiet me. I would apologize, half-heartedly, but I could see that every new quarrel loosened ties that were already tenuous. Why did she stay even this long, since we had no children? Pity for me, I suppose, and even a little love, because sentiments may superimpose themselves without destroying one another and, in women especially, there exists sometimes a curious desire to retain everything.

Much as François' influence had done toward diminishing her rarely expressed but nevertheless quite actual religious beliefs, the idea of divorce was still loathsome to Odile. Perhaps, too, she was attached, if not to me, at least to our life together, because of her love for the

things surrounding her. She loved this house which she had furnished herself, with so much taste. On a little table in her boudoir were spread her favorite books; near-by was the Venetian vase which always contained a single beautiful flower. When she took refuge in that solitude, she felt protected from me and from herself. She found it hard to tear herself away from all this. To leave me for François meant living in Toulon or in Brest most of the year; it meant giving up her friends. François alone could not fill her life, any more than I could. What she needed, I realize now, was constant animation around her and that men should display their souls for her amusement.

But she herself did not know that. She felt she was unhappy away from François and she thought she would find happiness if she were with him again. He had, for her, the glamour of the human being with whom we are not yet intimate and whose attributed possibilities are not yet exhausted. I had been that mythical and attractive person for her in the days of Florence and of England. I could not live up to the fictitious person she had put in my place. I was doomed. Now, it was François' turn. He, too, was going to be put to the test of complete intimacy. How would he fare?

I believe that, had he lived in Paris, his affair with Odile would have followed the course that nearly all such things do and would have ended without other incident than discovery by Odile that she had been

mistaken in François' charm. But he was far away and she was convinced she could not live without him. What were his feelings? I have no idea. Surely he could not help but respond to the love of such a beautiful woman. At the same time, if he were such as he had been described to me, the idea of marriage could not have occurred to him.

This is what I learned. At Christmas time he passed through Paris on his way from Brest to Toulon. He tarried two days, during which time Odile was most imprudent. She had been told of his arrival by telephone in the morning, before I had left for the office. I knew it was he when I saw the astonishing expression that came over her face while she was talking. Never before had I seen this submissive, tender, nearly beseeching expression. She was not aware, certainly, holding the black receiver and so far away from her lover how her pure and beautiful smile betrayed her to my eyes.

"Yes," she said, "I am delighted to hear your voice. . . . Yes . . . but . . ." she looked at me with some embarrassment and said, "call me up a little later, say in half an hour."

I asked her with whom she had been speaking. She put down the telephone with an air of indifference, without answering, just as though she had not heard. That day I arranged matters so as to go home to lunch. When I entered the house the maid gave me a sheet of paper upon which Odile had written, "If you come

back, don't worry about me. I had to lunch out. I shall see you this evening, dearest."

"Has Madame been out a long time?"

"Yes," said the maid, "since ten o'clock."

"Did she go in the car?"

"Yes, sir."

I lunched alone. After lunch I felt so distressed that I decided not to go back to the office. I wanted to be home when she came back. This time I was determined to ask her to choose between us. I spent an afternoon of torture. About seven o'clock, the telephone rang.

"Hello," said Odile's voice. "Is that you, Juliette?"

"No," I said, "it is I, Philippe."

"Really? Then you're back. Look here, I want to ask you if you would mind very much if I should dine here."

"What? Dine where? Why? You have already lunched out."

"Yes, but let me tell you. . . . I am in Compiègne. I am speaking from Compiègne, and in any case I should not be able to get back in time for dinner. . . ."

"What have you been doing in Compiègne? It's dark."

"Well, I took a walk in the woods; it is delightful in this cool air. And I had no idea you would be home to lunch."

"Odile, I don't wish to discuss this matter over the telephone, but all this is absurd. I want you to come back."

About ten in the evening she returned, and to my reproaches she replied,

"I don't care, I shall do the same thing to-morrow; I won't be locked up in Paris this fine weather."

She had assumed again that expression of pitiless determination which had struck me when she boarded the train for Brest and which had made me think that though I were lying on the tracks, she would ride over my body.

She came to me the next day, very sadly, and asked me to let her have a divorce; she said she would live with her family until the time came when she could marry François.

We were in her boudoir, before dinner. I objected very little. I had known for a long time that matters must end in the divorce courts and, moreover, her conduct during François' stay in Paris had led me to think that it were better not to see her any more. Despite this, the first feeling I had was contemptible; I thought: "No Marcenat has ever been divorced," and that next day I was going to be profoundly humiliated when I had to tell the story to my family. I was so ashamed of this thought that I made it a point of honor, after that, to look at the question only from the standpoint of Odile's interest. Soon the conversation took on a highly moral tone and, as usual, when we were sincere, it became affectionate. Dinner was announced. We went downstairs. Face to face, at the table, we

spoke very little, because of the servant. I looked at the plates, the glasses, all the things which bore the earmarks of Odile's exquisite taste; then I looked at her and thought, "perhaps it is the last time I shall look at this face which has held so much happiness for me." She looked at me also and her gaze melted into mine; she was pale and pensive. Perhaps, like myself, she wanted to fix in her memory features which she might never see again. The butler, indifferent and efficient, went silently from the table to the sideboard. The realization that he was ignorant of our trouble established a tacit complicity between Odile and me. After dinner we went back to her boudoir and talked seriously for a long time of what life was going to be for us. She gave me much advice. She said to me:

"You must remarry. You will be a perfect husband for another woman, I am sure. . . . I was not made for you . . . only don't marry Misa. That would hurt me, really, and she is a bad woman. Do you know who would be best suited to you; your cousin Renée. . . ."

"Dearest, you are mad. I shall never marry again. . . ."

"Of course you will . . . you must . . . and then, when you think of me, think kindly. I have loved you well, Dickie, and I am fully aware of your qualities. I assure you that the reason why I have not said flattering things to you was that I am timid, and then I

don't like compliments. . . . But more than once I have seen you do things that no other man would have done in your place. Then I would think, 'Dickie is a fine fellow, after all,' and I wanted to say something to you that would please you. In many ways, I prefer you to François, only . . ."

"Only what?" I asked.

"Only . . . I can't live without him. After a few hours with him, I have a feeling that I am strong, more alive, better. Perhaps it is not true; possibly I would have been happier with you. But it can't be helped, things did not go right. It is not your fault, Philippe; it is no one's fault."

As we said good night, late in the evening, she held her lips to me, spontaneously.

"Ah," she said, "what poor wretches we are."

Some days later, I received a letter from her, friendly and sad. She told me she had loved me profoundly and loyally and that she had never had a lover before François.

That is the story of my marriage. I do not know that in telling it to you I have been quite fair to my poor Odile. I wish I could have made you feel her charm, her mysterious melancholy, her extraordinary childishness. After she left, our acquaintances, friends, and relatives judged her severely. I, who had known her well, as well as any one could know this frail, mysterious girl, I thought that no woman could ever have been less guilty.

19.

I was very miserable after Odile went. The house was so unbearable to me that I could scarcely stay in it. At night once in a while, I went into her bedroom; sat in an armchair near her bed as I had done when she was there and I thought of our life together. I was disturbed by vague remorse; however, I could find nothing definite with which to reproach myself. I had married Odile whom I loved, even though my family had dreamed of a more brilliant marriage for me. I had been faithful to her until that evening with Misa and my brief betrayal had been caused by her. Undoubtedly, I had been jealous, but she had never done anything to reassure a husband who loved her and who, she could easily see, was suffering great pain. That was all true, I knew, but still I felt I was responsible. I began to get glimpses of a reality quite new to me at that time; the relationship which should exist between men and women struck me. I saw women as unstable human beings, constantly seeking a strong hand that would fix their thoughts and their wandering desires. Perhaps this would require of men that they be infallible compasses, North stars. A great love is not sufficient to anchor the being one loves, if one does not know at the same time how to fill her life with constantly renewed riches. What could Odile find in me? Every evening, I came back from the office where I had seen the same men, studied the same questions;

I sat in a chair and looked at my wife, and was happy in the thought that she was so beautiful. How could she get happiness from such a sterile existence? Women are naturally attracted to men whose lives are constantly moving and who carry them along in this movement, who give them a definite task to accomplish, and demand much of them. . . . I looked at Odile's little bed; what would I not give, now, to see the blonde head and the lovely body stretched upon it? How little I had given when I could have kept it all so easily! Instead of trying to understand her tastes, I had condemned them; I had tried to impose mine upon her. The silence which enveloped me now in this house, this almost terrifying silence, was the punishment for conduct which, though not unkind, had been without beauty.

I should have gone away, left Paris, but I could not make up my mind to do so. I found a painful joy in clinging to the slightest vestiges which recalled Odile to me. At least in this house, in the morning, in a half-slumber, it seemed to me that I could hear a clear and sweet voice saying, through the open door, "Good morning, Dickie!" January that year was like springtime. The leafless trees were outlined against a perfectly blue sky. Had Odile been here, she would have put on, as she used to say, a "little tailor suit," her gray fox around her neck and would have gone out in the morning. "Alone?" I would have asked her that evening. "I don't remember," she would have answered.

And I was sorry to feel that I should have been distressed at this absurd mystery making.

My nights were spent in an effort to determine the beginning of the tragedy. We were perfectly happy when we returned from England. Perhaps one single sentence pronounced in a different tone, kind but firm, would have averted it. One gesture, one word may determine our fate; a slight effort at the beginning may suffice to alter it before the giant mechanism is put into motion. But finally I became convinced that the most heroic acts could never rekindle in Odile the love that she had had for me.

Before she left, we had decided on divorce proceedings. It had been agreed that I should write her a letter in which I admitted an offense which would be grounds for a divorce. A few days later, I was called before the judge for the customary effort at reconciliation. It was horrible seeing Odile in this environment. A score of couples were waiting, the men separated from the women by an iron gate so as to avoid painful scenes. Some people called each other names across the gate; some women cried. The man next to me, a chauffeur, said to me, "The thing that makes me feel better is to see there are so many of us." Odile nodded her head at me, sweetly, affectionately, and I knew then how much I still loved her.

Finally, our turn came. The judge was a kindly man with a gray beard. He told Odile not to be upset; he reminded us of the many pleasant memories we

had in common, of the sacredness of the marriage bonds; then he tried to bring us together for the last time. I said, "Unfortunately, it is out of the question now." Odile was staring ahead, blankly. She seemed to be in pain. "Perhaps she regrets it a little," I thought; "perhaps she is already aware of her mistake. . . ." Then, as we both kept silent, I heard the judge say, "Very well, then, will you kindly sign these papers?"

Odile and I went out together. I said to her:

"Would you like to walk a bit?"

"Yes, it's such glorious weather. Have you ever seen a more exquisite winter?"

I reminded her that she had left many of her belongings at the house, and I asked her if she wished me to send them to her parents' house.

"It would be exceedingly kind of you, but I want you to keep anything you like . . . I haven't need of anything . . . then, Dickie, I shan't live very much longer; you'll be free of my memory too, soon."

"Why do you say such a thing, Odile, are you ill?"

"Not a bit of it; it's just a feeling I have. But I want you to have some one take my place very soon. If I were sure you would be happy, it would help me to be happy, a lot."

"I'll never be happy without you."

"Of course, you will. You will soon see how relieved you are going to be, not to have to bother with an unbearable wife any longer. I am not joking, you

know, it is true I am unbearable and I know it. . . . How glorious the Seine is at this time of the year!"

She stopped in front of a shop. There were marine maps in the window. I knew she liked them.

"Do you want them?"

She looked at me, sadly and affectionately.

"How kind you are! Yes, I should love to have them. It will be my last present from you." We went in and bought the maps; when we came out she hailed a taxi, then removed her glove so I might kiss her hand, and said,

"Thank you for everything." She entered the taxi and went without turning around.

20.

My family did not prove very helpful in the great loneliness which I suffered. At heart, mother was glad I was rid of Odile. She would not say so because she knew it would hurt me, and moreover, it was not the habit of my family ever to say much, but I felt it and it made contact with her a little difficult. Father was very ill; he had had a cerebral congestion and some paralysis of his left hand remained, and also a slight deformity of the mouth which marred his fine face. His condition was hopeless and he had grown very taciturn and grave. I had no desire to go to Aunt Cora's dinners; they evoked too many painful memories. The only person I could see without annoyance

and boredom was my cousin Renée. I met her at my mother's house one day. She showed much tact, and never said a word about my divorce; she was working for a master's degree and I had heard that she had made up her mind never to marry. It was her conversation, and the thought it provoked, that drew me for the first time away from perpetual analysis of the sentimental problems that I was constantly trying to solve. She was devoting her life to scientific research and seemed satisfied and content. Was it, then, possible to renounce love? I could think of no other reason for living than to devote myself to some Odile, but I found Renée's presence appeasing. I asked her to lunch with me and she accepted, and after that I saw her quite frequently. After a few meetings, the barrier was let down and I talked to her of Odile, as openly as I could, trying to make her see what it was in her that I had loved.

"When you get your final decree, will you marry again?"

"Never. How about yourself? Have you never thought of marriage?"

"No, now that I have a job it fills my life. I am independent and I have never yet met a man who attracted me enough to marry him."

"What about all those doctors?"

"They are friends, that's all."

Toward the end of February, I was about to go for a few weeks to the mountains, when I was summoned

to Gandumas by telegram. Father had had another stroke; he was dying when I arrived. Mother looked after him with wonderful devotion. I recall that during his last night, while he was in coma, I saw her standing beside this inert body, wiping the forehead, wetting the poor distorted lips and I marveled at the serenity she displayed in her overwhelming sorrow. She owed this calm, I am sure, to her knowledge of the righteousness of my father's life. An existence like that of my parents appeared very beautiful to me, even though it was beyond my understanding. Mother had pursued none of the pleasures that Odile and most of the young women I knew seemed to find indispensable. While still young, she had given up romancing and adventure, and now she was reaping her reward. I cast a painful retrospect over my own life; it would have been sweet to imagine an Odile standing by my bedside, as I approached the end of the journey, wiping the perspiration of a last agony from my forehead; Odile with silvered hair, softened by age and beyond the tempests of youth. Shall I be alone one day before death? I hoped it would be very soon

I never heard of Odile, even indirectly. She had said she would not write to me. She felt I would get over my sorrow more quickly were she to remain silent; and she no longer saw any of our mutual friends. I fancied she had taken a little villa near François, but I was not sure of that. And I had made up my mind to move out of our house, far too big for me alone

and far too full of memories. I found in rue Duroc an old apartment and I furnished it in a way that I thought Odile would have liked. Who knew? Perhaps some day she would come back, wounded and unhappy, asking for shelter. In moving I found a lot of letters Odile had received from friends. I read them. Perhaps I should not have done so, but I could not resist an overwhelming curiosity. I have already told you these letters were friendly and affectionate, but they revealed no guilt.

I spent the summer at Gandumas, in a solitude that was almost complete. I found surcease of my thoughts only when I threw myself down upon the grass, far away from the house. For a few moments I would feel that I had severed all connection with the world and renewed contact with more profound and vital needs. Was any woman worth all this suffering? But books plunged me anew into my morbid introspections, for I searched and often found my own unhappiness in them. Hence I chose those which reminded me of my sad fate.

I returned to Paris in October. A few women, attracted as they always are by a man's loneliness, came into my life. I shall not describe them to you; they passed through my life and left no impress. What I want to convey to you is that I found again without effort, though not without astonishment, the attitude of my adolescence. I played with it as I had with the women who had occupied my thoughts before my marriage. I pursued them for the sake of the sport,

amused to see the effect of a word or of a gesture. As soon as I had bagged game, I forgot about it, and looked around for something new.

Nothing makes one more cynical than a great love which is not reciprocated; but, on the other hand, nothing makes one more modest. I was amazed every time I knew I was loved. The truth is that a passion which absorbs a man attracts women to him at the very time when he wishes it least. Engrossed by another, he becomes, even though naturally sentimental and affectionate, indifferent and almost brutal. His unhappiness makes him receptive to any affection offered him, but as soon as he has tasted of it, he makes no effort to conceal that he is tired of it. Unwittingly and unknowingly, he plays the most cruel of all games. He becomes dangerous and is bent on conquering because he has been defeated. Such was my own case. Never had I been more convinced that I was unattractive, and never did I receive more convincing proof of devotion and love.

But my mind was too upset to let me enjoy whatever success I had. When I look through my diary of that year 1913, I find memories of Odile mixed in with the engagements recorded on every page. I copy some of them for you haphazardly:

*October 20. I remember her demands. How much more we love people who are exacting. How delightful it is to pick a bouquet of wild flowers, bluebells, sun-*

*flowers and daisies, or a white symphony of wake-robins and white tulips for her, uncertain of how she will receive them.*

*I remember her meekness. "I know very well how you wish me to be . . . very grave, very pure . . . quite the French bourgeoise . . . and yet passionate, but only for you. . . . You must give it up, Dickie. I'll never be like that."*

*Then her modest pride, "I do have a few good qualities. I have read more than most women. I know a lot of very good poetry by heart. I know how to fix flowers and I know how to wear my clothes . . . and I love you, yes indeed I do. You may not believe it, but I love you very much."*

*October 25. There should be a brand of love so perfect that one could share all the feelings of the person one loves at the time she feels them. There were days when I was almost grateful to François (before I knew him well) that he was so nearly Odile's ideal . . . then jealousy was the stronger, and François not perfect enough.*

*October 28. I love in others the little of you that I see in them.*

*October 29. At times, you were tired of me. I even loved this lassitude.*

A little further on in the book, I find this brief comment, "I lost more than I had." That expresses quite well what was going on within me at the time. Loving

Odile even as I did, when she was present I was aware of her faults and they alienated me a little from her. Absent, she again became the goddess; I endowed her with virtues which she did not possess, and finally having patterned her after the eternal ideal of Odile, I could play the knight to her. What superficial knowledge and the blindness of desire had achieved at the time of our engagement, forgetfulness and absence achieved to-day and I loved Odile, unfaithful and far away, as I had never loved her near and affectionate.

21.

Toward the end of the year I heard that Odile and François had married. It was a shock to me, but the certainty that the evil was now beyond remedy helped me to find courage to live.

Following my father's death, I had made many changes in the business. I now took less active part in it; hence, I had more leisure. This allowed me to pick up the threads of intimacy with old friends which my marriage had broken, particularly with André Halff, who had become a counsellor of state. I also saw Bertrand occasionally. He was lieutenant of cavalry and quartered at Saint-Germain, but he spent nearly every Sunday in Paris. I began again to read and to study, which I had not done for some years. I took courses both at the Sorbonne and at the Collège de France. I discovered what a tremendous change had

taken place in me, and was astonished to note that problems which had seemed of the greatest importance to me some years before now left me entirely cold. Was there ever a time really when I worried whether I was materialist or idealist? Metaphysics now appeared childish to me.

At this time, I saw more young women than I did men friends. I left my office about five every afternoon and I went into society more than I had ever done. It chagrined me to realize that now I did in the name of pleasure the thing which, when Odile imposed it upon me, I considered a hardship. I consoled myself by saying it was an effort to revive her memory. Many of the women I met at avenue Marceau knew that I was unattached and quite free, therefore they invited me. Every Saturday at six, I went to Hélène de Thianges, who was at home to her friends once a week. Her husband Maurice, now a senator, brought his own friends there. Besides men in politics, one met writers, friends of Hélène, and men of affairs, for Hélène's father, Pascal-Bouchet, had been a manufacturer. He often came on Saturday from Normandy and brought his second daughter Françoise. There was much cordiality in that little group. I loved to sit beside a pretty woman, and to discuss matters of sentiment with her. My wound was still painful, but I sometimes spent entire days without thinking of Odile or of François. Now and then I heard of them; since Odile's name had been changed to de Crozant, there

were people who did not know that she had been my wife and had met her at Toulon where she had become famous as the most beautiful woman of the town; they spoke of her and of her doings. At such times, Hélène de Thianges would attempt to change the topic or to get me away. But I always tried to hear all I could.

It was generally believed that their matrimonial affairs were not going very well. Yvonne Prévost frequently had occasion to go to Toulon and stay there for several days at a time. I asked her to tell me quite frankly what she knew or had heard about them. She seemed reluctant to do so, but finally said,

"It's very difficult to explain: I have seen very little of them. . . . My impression is that they both realized, the moment they married, they had made a mistake. Still, she loves him. . . . I am sorry to tell you all this, Marcenat, but you asked me to. She certainly loves him more than he loves her, only she is proud and does not want to show she loves him so much. I lunched with them once, and the atmosphere was very uncomfortable. . . . You understand what I mean? She said many nice things, sometimes naïve ones, you know, the sort you used to admire but which met with rebuff from François. . . . You know, he can be quite brutal at times. I can't tell you how sorry I was for her. . . . It was easy to see she wanted to please him by talking about things that would interest or amuse him. . . . Naturally, she did not talk very

intelligently, and he received what she said with irritation and contempt, 'Yes, Odile, yes, of course. . . .' I assure you, Roger and I suffered for her."

The entire winter of 1914 passed in transitory affairs with women, in business trips that were not absolutely necessary and studies that did not have a very definite objective. I did not feel like taking anything seriously. I avoided close intimacy both with individuals and with ideas. I was ready to abandon them, so as not to suffer if they should abandon me. In early May, Hélène de Thianges began to entertain in her garden. The ladies sat upon cushions, the men upon the grass. The first Saturday of June there was an amusing group of writers and politicians gathered around Father Cenival. Hélène's little dog was lying at her feet, and she had asked the priest, most seriously,

"Monsieur l'Abbé, do animals have souls? Because if they have not, I give it up. Now, there's my little dog who has suffered so much. . . ."

"Of course, they have souls," said the Abbé; "what makes you think they haven't? They have miniature souls."

"That's not very orthodox," said one of the group, "but it's disturbing just the same."

I was sitting a short distance away from the group with an American, Beatrice Howell. We could hear the conversation.

"I am sure that animals have souls. Fundamentally, there is no difference between them and us. . . . I was

just saying that to myself a little while ago. I spent the afternoon at the zoo. I adore animals, Marcenat."

"So do I. Let's go there together some time."

"I'd love to. . . . What was I saying just now? Oh, yes, I remember. This afternoon, I was looking at the seals. I like to watch them; they glisten like pieces of wet rubber; they tumble around in the water and come up every minute or two for air. Poor things, I thought. What a monotonous life they lead; then it occurred to me, what about ourselves? What else do we do? We turn around in circles under the water the whole week, and then on Saturday about six, we show our heads at Hélène de Thianges', on Tuesday at the Duchesse de Rohan's, at Madeleine Lemaire's and on Sunday at Madame de Martel's. It's exactly the same idea, isn't it?"

At that moment, Captain Prévost and his wife came in. They both looked very serious. Even the way they walked revealed their concern. Hélène rose to welcome them. I watched her because I loved to see the grace and charm she displayed in greeting her guests. I always used to say to her, "You are like a white butterfly, who flutters by people."

The Prévosts began to tell her something and as they did, her face in turn became very grave. She looked around as though she were upset and her eyes, encountering mine, suddenly looked away. The little group withdrew.

"Do you know the Prévosts?" Beatrice Howell asked.

"Yes, I have been to their place in Toulon. They have a charming old house. . . . I love the quays of Toulon. The sea and those old houses . . . it's a lovely sight."

Several persons had joined Hélène and the Prévosts, so that they spoke quite loudly and it seemed to me I heard my name mentioned.

"I wonder what it's all about; let's go and find out."

I helped her get up, brushed some grass and earth from her frock and Hélène, seeing us, came forward.

"Beatrice, I am going to ask you to excuse me a minute, I want to have a word with Marcenat . . ." turning to me she said, "I am terribly sorry—more sorry than I can say, to be the first to tell you of this frightful thing, but I could not risk that any one else should do it. The Prévosts came in to tell me that your wife . . . that Odile shot herself at Toulon this morning."

"Odile? . . . My God! Why?"

In my mind's eye I saw her frail body with a bleeding wound and suddenly something she used to say popped into my mind, "Under the influence of Mars . . . fatally condemned . . ."

"No one knows. . . . You go now without saying good-by to any one. As soon as I know anything further, I shall telephone you." I began to walk aimlessly toward the Bois. What had happened? My poor child, why didn't you call me if you were unhappy.

With what mad joy would I have gone to your aid. I would have taken you home and consoled you. I had known from the first day I had seen François that he was Odile's evil genius. I recalled the dinner and the impression I had received, and remembered the thought I had of a father who, inadvertently, exposed his child to contagion. I knew that day that I must make every effort to save her as quickly as possible, and I had not saved her. . . . Odile dead! Women who passed me in the street looked at me suspiciously. Perhaps I was talking aloud. . . . Such beauty . . . such charm. . . . I saw myself near her bed, holding her hand and I heard her reciting to me,

*From too much love of living,*
*From hope and fear set free. . . .*

"The weariest river, Dickie," she used to say, in a self-pitying, comical voice, and I used to reply, "Don't say that, dear. You are going to make me cry."

Odile dead! From the very first day I knew her, I had a definite superstitious fear about her. . . . Too beautiful. . . . One day at Bagatelle, an old gardener said to us, to Odile and to me, "The most beautiful roses are the first to fade. . . ." Odile dead! . . . If only I could have seen her for fifteen minutes and then died with her, how gladly I would have accepted my fate.

I don't know how I got home, or how I got to bed.

Toward morning I fell asleep and dreamed that I was dining at Aunt Cora's. André Halff, Hélène de Thianges, Bertrand and my cousin Renée were there. I looked everywhere for Odile. After a long, anxious search I found her, stretched upon a sofa. She was pale and seemed very ill, and I thought, "Yes, she is ill but she is not dead." What a frightful dream it was!

22.

My first impulse the next morning was to go to Toulon. But for a week I was in bed with high fever and delirium. Bertrand and André were devoted to me. Hélène came several times with flowers. As soon as I was myself again, I asked her to tell me all that she knew. She had heard different versions, all contradictory, as were those that I had heard. The substance of them all seemed to be that François, accustomed to complete independence, had soon tired of matrimony. Odile disappointed him. Spoiled by me as she had been, she grew more and more exacting as François grew less loving. He had believed her intelligent. She was not; at least in the ordinary sense of the word. I knew it, but I did not care. He had tried to discipline her mind and to direct her conduct. They were both proud and they soon clashed violently.

Much later, indeed about six months ago, a woman told me something she had heard François say about Odile, "She was beautiful and I have really loved her.

But her first husband trained her altogether wrong. She was a born coquette. She was the only woman who was ever able to make me suffer . . . I fought against it . . . I took her to pieces . . . I spread her open upon the table . . . I examined all the wheels of her little lies . . . I showed her that I could read her like a book . . . she thought she could win me back with her charm; finally she understood it was useless . . . that she was beaten . . . I am sorry, of course, that it happened, but I have no remorse. I could not have helped it."

When I heard this, I felt an overwhelming hatred of François. Yet, at times, I had to admire him. He had been stronger than I and perhaps cleverer; we had both understood Odile's make-up, but I had not had the courage to let her know it, and he had. Was François' brutality preferable to my timorousness? The more I thought of it, the less did I regret my conduct. It is easy to break human beings, and to lead them to despair. Even now, in full realization of the failure I have made, I still believe that it is better to love, even though one's love is unrequited.

None of this gives a satisfying explanation of Odile's suicide. The one thing certain is that François was not in Toulon when she killed herself. During the war, Bertrand met a man who had dined with her, three other women and three naval officers on the day before her death. It was a very jolly party. Drinking champagne, Odile said, laughingly, to the others, "Do you

know, I am going to kill myself to-morrow at noon!" She had not been at all excited that evening, and the man who related it to Bertrand said that he had remarked the white radiance of her beauty.

I was ill for a month. Then I went to Toulon, stayed there several days, and covered Odile's grave with flowers. One evening while I was in the cemetery, an elderly woman came to me and said she had been Odile's maid; she had recognized me from a photograph that she had often seen in Odile's drawer. She told me that although Odile always appeared very happy in public, even during the first weeks of her marriage she had noticed that when she was alone she had a despairing look. "At times, I would enter her bedroom and find her in an armchair, her head resting in her hands. . . . She seemed to be looking at death."

I talked with her a long time, and it pleased me to see that she had loved Odile.

There was nothing for me to do at Toulon, so at the beginning of July I decided to live at Gandumas. There I tried to work and to read. I took long walks through the briar and the only way I could sleep was by overtiring my body.

Nearly every night I dreamed of Odile. In these dreams I would see myself in a church or in a theater, but the stall next to mine was always empty. I wondered where Odile was. I looked for her. I saw pale and disheveled women, but none of them resembled her. I always awoke before I could find her.

I could not work. I did not even go to the mill. I could not bear to see any human being. Every morning I walked to the village; the sound of the organ came from the church, so soft and low that it mingled with the air and seemed to be its whisper. I imagined Odile walking by my side, wearing the white dress that she had worn the first day we walked together beneath the dark cypresses of Florence. Why had I lost her? I tried to recall the word, the episode, that had transformed this great love into such calamity. I could not find it. The gardens were filled with roses she would have loved.

It was during one of the walks in Chardeuil, one Saturday in August, 1914, that I heard the beating of a drum and the cry, "General Mobilization of the Army and Navy."

# PART II

## ISABELLE

## *Isabelle*

### I.

To-night, Philippe, I have come to work in your study. When I entered it, I could scarcely realize that I would not find you there. You remain so real to me, Philippe. I can still see you in that armchair, your legs folded beneath you, a book in your hand. I can see you at dinner, your eyes looking away from me when you are no longer listening to what I say. I can see you talking with a friend, your long fingers playing ceaselessly with a pencil or an eraser. I loved your mannerisms.

Three months have passed since that horrible night when you said to me, "Isabelle, I can't breathe. I am going to die." I can still hear that voice which was no longer yours. Shall I ever forget it? The thing that seems more odious to me than anything else is that possibly my grief will die too. If you but knew how it hurt me when, with your relentless sincerity you said, "Now, I have lost Odile forever. I can't even recall her face."

You loved her, Philippe. I have finished rereading the long narrative you sent me at the time of our marriage, and I have envied her. That much at least will remain of her. Of me, nothing. And yet, in your way

you have loved me too. I have here, under my eyes, your very first letters, those you wrote to me in 1919. You loved me then, yes, almost too much. I remember once saying to you, "You think my stock is worth three hundred; in reality, Philippe, forty is my par, and the thing that fills me with fear is that when you realize your mistake you will think I am worth ten, possibly nothing." But that was the way you were. You used to tell me that Odile always said you expected too much of women, that you rated them too highly, and that it was a dangerous thing to do. She was right, poor little thing.

For the last fortnight I have been struggling against a desire which has increased in intensity daily. I want to record my love as you have recorded yours. Do you think, Philippe, that I shall be able to write our story, however artlessly? The only way to do it is the way you did it, candidly, without prejudice or bias, and with great fidelity to detail. I know it will be difficult. It is such a temptation to pity oneself and make a self-portrait that looks as one would like to look. And the temptation is particularly strong for me. You used to warn me, "Don't feel sorry for yourself." But I have your letters, I have the little red book that you used to hide so carefully, and I have also the diary I started which you asked me to abandon. I think I shall try it. . . . I sit at your desk. The impress of your hand still remains on this green leather, spotted with ink. An awesome silence surrounds me. I think I shall try. . . .

2.

I remember the house where we lived in the rue Ampère. I see the ferns in jars covered with green baize, the imitation Gothic furniture in the dining room, the ornate and highly carved sideboard, the chairs with the head of Quasimodo which stuck into your back. I see the red damask sitting room with its gilded armchairs; my own little bedroom once all white, now faded and dirty; the schoolroom, a sort of storage room in which I took my meals with my governess when there was a "big dinner." I see it all so vividly. Sometimes Mademoiselle and I had to wait for our dinner until ten o'clock; then a perspiring, irritable, tired butler would bring some lukewarm soup and some melting ice cream to us on a tray. It seemed to me that he realized, as I did, the unimportant, nearly inexistent rôle the solitary child played in this household.

My childhood was tragic. "You think it was," you used to say. I am not mistaken, though. I was most miserable. Was it my parents' fault? I used to think it was. Now, however, disciplined by suffering and looking at the past with clearer eyes, I realize that my parents believed they were doing their duty; their method was severe and fraught with danger, and it seems to me that its results condemn it.

I say "my parents" but in reality I should say "my mother," for absorbed as my father was in his diplo-

matic career, he asked only two things of his daughter: that she should be invisible and silent. For a long time, his prestige was increased in my eyes by his aloofness. I considered him my natural ally against mother, because on several occasions I heard him say to her, with amused irony, when she had been complaining of my trying disposition, "You remind me of Delcassé; he pretends he is advancing European affairs by hiding behind them, convincing himself he is pushing them. . . . You think one can mold human beings. . . . You're mistaken, my dear. . . . We believe we are actors when we are mere spectators." Mother would look at him, disapprovingly, and point to me as if to caution him. She was not a bad sort, but she sacrificed my happiness and her own to the bogey of apprehension. "The only illness your mother has is hypertrophy of prudence," father said to me, once; and it was true. She considered life a fierce battle for which one must be trained and hardened. "A spoiled child makes an unhappy woman," she would say. "No child should be allowed to grow up in the belief she will never need for money; God alone knows what life has in store for her." "It is bad for a young girl to have compliments paid to her." She was constantly telling me that I was plain and that men would never be attracted to me. She saw that this often made me cry, but childhood was for her what life on earth is to those who believe in hell; the one thing that mattered, at any cost, at any penance, was that my soul and body should be led

to temporal salvation in which marriage took the place of the day of judgment.

This sort of education might have been beneficial to me had I had her strength of character, or her self-confidence and beauty. But I was timid by nature, and fear made me unsociable. From my eleventh year, I fled all human contact and took refuge in books. I loved history passionately. When I was fifteen, my heroines were Joan of Arc and Charlotte Corday; at eighteen, Louise de la Vallière. I found a strange pleasure in reading of the Carmelite's self-imposed suffering, and of Joan's torture. It seemed to me, too, that I would have been capable of limitless physical courage. Father had a profound contempt for fear, and even when I was a little child he would make me stay alone in the garden, after dark; during my brief illnesses he insisted that I should neither be coddled nor indulged. A visit to the dentist was for me a step toward heroic sanctity.

When father left the Foreign Affairs office in Paris and was appointed French Minister at Belgrade, mother closed our Paris house for several months each year, and sent me to my grandparents in Lozère. I was more wretched there even than at home. I did not like the country; I preferred buildings to landscapes, churches to trees. When I read the diary I kept in my youth, I feel as if I am flying in a slow plane above endless stretches of boredom. It seemed to me that I would never get over being fifteen, sixteen, seventeen.

My parents, who were convinced they were bringing me up well, destroyed in me all taste for happiness. The first ball, which for most women remains a delightful memory, brilliant and gay, revives painful and humiliating emotions in me. It was in 1913. My dress had been made at home by my mother's maid. I knew it was ugly, but mother despised luxury. "Men don't look at dresses; they don't care for a woman because of what she wears." I was not popular in society. I was an awkward young girl, suffering from lack of affection. People found me stiff, clumsy, snobbish. I was stiff because I had spent my whole life trying to repress myself, clumsy because I had never been allowed any freedom of action or of thought, snobbish because I was too timid and modest to talk with ease of myself or of anything. So I sought refuge in serious topics. At dances, young men fought shy of me because of what seemed to be a pedantic display of learning. No one will ever know with what ardor I longed for the man who would deliver me from this slavery, from these long months in Lozère where I saw no one; where I knew in the morning that nothing would happen to break the monotony of the day save an hour's walk with Mademoiselle. I pictured my liberator handsome and charming. Every time "Siegfried" was given at the opera, I begged Mademoiselle to take me there because in my own eyes I was a captive Valkyrie who could be freed only by a hero.

My repressed emotion, of which I had a religious display at the time of my first communion, found a real outlet in the war. As early as August, 1914, having a nurse's diploma, I asked to be sent to the war zone. Father was far away from home and mother was with him. My grandparents, panic-stricken, allowed me to go. The ambulance to which I was assigned at Belmont had been financed by Baroness Choin. The chief nurse was Renée Marcenat. She was a good-looking woman, very intelligent and rather proud. She saw immediately that in me there was real, though still latent, capacity to do something. And she made me her assistant.

It was there I first learned that I was not wholly without attraction. Renée Marcenat said to Madame Choin one day in my presence, "Isabelle is my best nurse; her only fault is that she is too pretty." That thrilled me.

A second lieutenant of infantry, who had been treated in our hospital for a minor wound, asked on leaving if he could write to me. The dangers that I knew he was about to face prompted me to answer his letters more affectionately and feelingly than I otherwise would have done. He grew more and more affectionate, and before I knew just how it had happened, I was engaged to him. I could not believe it. It seemed unreal, but in those days life moved fast and things happened quickly. My parents, who had been apprised of the event, wrote that Jean de Cheverny

belonged to a good family and that they approved of the marriage. All that I knew of Jean was that he was handsome and jolly. We had four days to ourselves in a Paris hotel near the Etoile. Then my husband returned to the front and I to the hospital. That was the end of my matrimonial venture. He hoped he would have another leave of absence during the winter, but he was killed at Verdun in February, 1916. At that time, I thought I loved him. When his papers and a little snapshot of me which he had carried were sent to me after his death, I cried brokenheartedly, and my grief was sincere.

3.

After the signing of the armistice, father was appointed ambassador to Pekin. He asked me to go with him. I declined. I had developed habits of independence which made paternal authority unbearable. I had sufficient means to support myself. My parents permitted me to take the second story of their house and convert it into an apartment, and I became closely associated with Renée Marcenat in her work. She had joined the laboratory of the Pasteur Institute and had soon made herself indispensable there.

I not only admired Renée, but I had a deep affection for her. I was somewhat envious of her efficiency and self-assurance, but at the same time I realized that she was not invulnerable. She tried to give the impression that she never wanted to marry, but I thought I could

detect, in what she said of her cousin Philippe Marcenat, that she would like to become his wife.

"He is," she would say, "a very self-contained human being, secretive, who appears unapproachable to one who does not know him well. In reality he is morbidly sensitive. . . . The war did him good, it got him out of a rut. He is about as fit to be the director of a paper mill as I am to be a prima donna. . . ."

"Why? Does he do anything else?"

"No, but he reads a lot, and he is really cultured. . . . He is quite remarkable, I assure you . . . I know you'd like him. . . ."

Somehow, I knew she loved him.

There were many young men in my life. The war had broken down many social restrictions and conventions. I was alone, and in the group of physicians and young scientists who composed Renée's social circle I found several who interested me, but I never actually lost my heart to any of them. When one of them said he loved me I could not make myself believe it. My mother's words, "You are so desperately plain," were always ringing in my ears even though they had been given the lie many times. My self-distrust remained firmly anchored. I could not rid myself of the belief that when I was wanted as wife it was for my fortune; or as mistress, it was because I was easy-going and not too exacting.

One day, Renée told me that Baroness Choin had

asked me to dine at her house. She went there often herself, on Tuesday.

"It bores me so," I said. "I hate society, you know."

"Come on, you'll see it is not so bad; she generally has interesting people, and you will meet my cousin Philippe. If it grows too unbearable, we'll get off together in a corner and have our own little party."

"All right, I am dying to meet him."

That was true. Renée had finally made me feel that I wanted to know Philippe Marcenat. When she told me of the tragedy of his marriage, I recalled that I had met his wife and found her very beautiful. They said he was still in love with her, and Renée herself, though it was obvious she had not admired everything her cousin did, could not deny that she had rarely seen more perfect beauty. "There is one thing I shall never forgive her and that is her disloyalty to Philippe, who, himself, was loyalty personified." I had questioned her concerning details about them. During the war, I had read many of his letters to Renée. There was a sad note in them all that appealed to me.

Madame Choin's house and her flock of servants repelled me. When I entered, I saw Renée immediately. She was standing near the fireplace and by her side was a very tall man, his hands in his pockets. Philippe Marcenat was not handsome, but there was something kind and comfortable about his looks. When he was introduced to me, I felt for the first time in my life at ease with a stranger. I was glad when I found

myself next to him at dinner. And after dinner we managed to get together again.

"Wouldn't you like to get away from this crowd and have a quiet talk?" he said. "Come along, I know this house well."

He took me to the Chinese room. The memory I have of that conversation, now, is that it was an exchange of childhood recollections. Yes, that very evening Philippe told me of his life in Limousin and we were amused at the similarity of our two families. His Gandumas home was furnished in much the same style as our Paris home had been. His mother had said, just as mine had, "Men don't look at dresses."

"There is no denying," Philippe said, "that there is something powerfully strong in this peasant and bourgeoise heredity which is the backbone of so many French families. . . . It's quite beautiful, in its way, but I can't stick it any more; I am afraid I have lost faith in it."

"I have not," I said, laughing. "For instance, there are things I can't do, possibly . . . just now, although I live alone and have no one dependent upon me, I can't buy flowers or sweets for myself. It would seem unmoral to me, and would certainly give me no pleasure."

He looked at me, astonished.

"Not really? Do you mean to tell me that you could not buy flowers?"

"I can for a dinner, or a tea. But I mean for my-

self, just for the pleasure of looking at them, I can't."

"Don't you love flowers?"

"I suppose I do . . . but I can get along without them."

I thought I could detect a look of irony in his eyes, somewhat sad, too, and I changed the subject. It was this trend of our conversation which must have struck him, because I find this entry in his little red book:

*March 23, 1919. Dined at Aunt Cora's. Spent most of the evening with Madame de Cheverny, Renée's lovely friend, in the Chinese room, on a sofa. Strangely enough . . . she does not look at all like Odile and yet . . . perhaps it was only because she wore a white frock . . . she is sweet, shy. . . . At first I found it hard to talk to her, but later she became confiding. She said, for instance:*

*"This morning, something happened which made me . . . what shall I say . . . indignant, I suppose. A woman whom I scarcely know, not at all an intimate friend, you know, telephoned me and said, 'Now don't forget, Isabelle, I am lunching with you to-day.' I can't understand how any one can lie like that and, moreover, bring a third person into it. I think it is contemptible."*

*"Oh, I don't know, you must not judge harshly, so many women have difficult lives."*

*"They have difficult lives because they make them so. They believe that boredom will engulf them unless*

*they surround themselves with mystery and intrigue. It isn't true at all; life is not made up of futile and trivial intrigues. Why should one always need to rub his sensitiveness against that of another? Don't you think I am right?"*

*Renée came and sat beside us and said,*

*"May I disturb this flirtation?" But, as we both remained silent, she chuckled and went away. After a few moments her friend said,*

*"Don't you believe that the only sort of love that is worth while is based upon absolute confidence between two human beings, a sort of pure glass through which one may look without seeing mysterious darkness?"*

*At that moment, I suppose she thought she had hurt me, for she blushed. I must admit that what she said had hurt me. Then she said a few kind words, awkwardly but with feeling. Renée came up again, this time with Dr. de Fleury, and the conversation turned to the endocrine glands and internal secretions. He said, "They must be utilized therapeutically. The physician who does not use them is not worthy of his profession." It was an amusing technical discussion. I admired Renée's lucidity of thought and richness of expression. Her friend gave me a beautiful look as we said good night.*

I remember the sentence that had hurt Philippe. I, too, had thought of it on the way home that night, and the next day I wrote him a few lines to apologize for

the awkwardness I had displayed the night before in expressing my ideas. I told him, too, that I had felt quite friendly toward him, for a long time, thanks to what his cousin Renée had said of him and I added that, since he was alone, I should like to have him call on me some time. He wrote,

"Your letter, dear madame, confirmed the impression I received from your personality. You are blessed with the sort of delicate kindness which gives so much charm to intelligence. You spoke to me spontaneously of my solitude and sorrow, and with such simple and evident sympathy that I experienced a feeling of confidence. I accept gratefully the friendship you offer me. I do not believe you can realize how precious it will be to me."

I invited Philippe and Renée to lunch; and Philippe asked us to go to his house. I liked the little apartment where he received us. I remember particularly two beautiful Sisleys (landscapes over the Seine) in lavender tones, and on the table flowers of soft colors. The conversation was easy, amusing though serious, and it was apparent that we formed a little group that took pleasure in being together.

Then, Renée invited Philippe and me. He asked us to go to the theater with him the next day, and gradually we began to see each other two or three times a week. I was quite amused to notice during these little parties that Renée took pains to give the impression that Philippe and she were hosts and that I was guest.

I never showed that I noticed it, but I knew, though he had never said so, that Philippe preferred being alone with me. One evening Renée was not well and could not go with us. During the dinner he spoke to me of his first marriage, and spoke of it beautifully. Then I understood that though everything Renée had told me of Odile was true, it was not accurate. When she spoke of Odile, I had the impression of a beautiful woman but a dangerous one. When he spoke of her, I saw a frail little girl who had done her best and failed. That night Philippe was charming. I admired the tender memory he had retained of the woman who had been the cause of so much suffering to him. It occurred to me then that perhaps he was the hero I had been awaiting. Toward the end of April he made a long journey. He was not well, coughed a great deal and the doctors advised him to go to a warmer climate. I received this card from Rome, "Cara signora, I am writing you with my window wide open; the sky is blue and cloudless; the columns and the arches of the Forum are emerging from a sandy and golden mist. Everything is incredibly beautiful."

Later, one from Tangiers, "The first stage of a dream-journey, on a calm sea, silver-gray and purple. Tangiers? It has something of Constantinople, of Asnières and of Toulon. It is dirty and impressive, as all the East is." Then a telegram from Oran, "Come to lunch with me on Thursday at one o'clock. Greetings and regards. Marcenat."

That morning when I saw Renée at the laboratory, I said,

"So we are lunching at Philippe's to-day, aren't we?"

"What? Is he back?"

I showed her the telegram; her face assumed an expression of injury and sorrow which I had never seen there before, but she quickly controlled herself and said,

"That's right, but you'll lunch alone because I have not been invited."

It was embarrassing for me. Later, Philippe told me that the chief object of his journey had been to terminate his growing intimacy with Renée. Their families had taken it almost for granted that they were engaged, and that annoyed him very much. Renée, I must say, dropped out of his life without a murmur. She remained our friend, though perhaps somewhat embittered at times. She had taught me to admire Philippe. From that time, she welcomed with a sadness that had a touch of malice in it, everything disparaging that was said of him.

Philippe thought her attitude was quite human, but I was less indulgent.

## 4.

Philippe and I saw a great deal of one another that summer. He carried on his business, but every day he stole a few hours from it, and he went to Gandumas

only once a month. Nearly every morning he telephoned me and we planned a walk in the afternoon when the weather was fine, and in the evening we went to dinner or the theater. Philippe was the perfect friend for a woman. It was his constant pleasure to meet my wishes and satisfy my desires. He would send me flowers, a book we had discussed, things he had admired during our walks. I say that he had admired, because Philippe's tastes were quite different from mine and he had confidence in his. This confidence was a mystery to me and I was always trying to understand it. When we were in a restaurant together, he would pass judgment on the clothes the women wore, characterize their style and reflect upon the personality they revealed. And I noticed, with something akin to fright, that his impressions and judgments were generally quite the opposite of mine. With my obsession for methodical classification, I tried to find a key to "think like Philippe," to "translate from Philippe's viewpoint." And I could not do it though I wanted very much to succeed. I would say,

"But don't you think that dress is pretty?"

"Pretty, that salmon-colored affair? Never."

I would admit he was right, but I could not see why.

With books or plays, it was much the same. Even in our first conversations, I noticed he was shocked when I said I thought Bataille a great playwright and Rostand a great poet.

"Of course, I must admit that Cyrano amused me a lot, and perhaps stirred me, too, when I was young, and after all it is well done; but it has not the qualities of greatness."

I thought he was unfair, but I did not dare defend my belief for fear of setting him against me. The books he gave me to read (Stendhal, Proust, Mérimée) at first bored me. But I soon began to love them because I saw why he did. Philippe's taste in books was easy to understand; he belonged to that class of readers who look for themselves in the books they read. The books he loaned me were covered with marginal notes, difficult to read, but they helped me to follow his own thought through that of the author. Everything that gave me a clue to his make-up interested me enormously.

The trouble he took to form my taste never failed to astonish and amuse me. I may have had many faults but I was not conceited. I thought I was stupid and plain, and I was constantly wondering what he could see in me. He liked to see me and tried to please me, there was no doubt of that. And it could not be said that I was flirting with him. Respect for Renée's rights had, from the beginning, prevented me even from imagining any sort of intimacy with Philippe. It was he who had chosen me. Why? I had a feeling, at once pleasant and disturbing, that he hung on me, as one hangs a cloak on a peg, a soul much more beautiful and worthwhile than mine really was. In the note I have

quoted already he had registered the thought, "She does not look like Odile at all and yet . . . perhaps it was only because she wore a white frock." Certainly, I was not at all like Odile, but there exist subtle and fleeting impressions and sometimes they have the greatest influence on our lives.

It is not true that love is blind; the truth is that love remains indifferent to faults or weaknesses which it sees quite clearly if it finds in a human being the thing that matters most and which as a rule cannot be described. Deep in his heart, Philippe knew, though perhaps he would not admit it to himself, that I was a sweet, timid, not very remarkable woman, but he had need of me. He wanted me to be ready to leave everything for him. I was neither his wife nor his mistress, yet he exacted scrupulous fidelity. Several times, when I went out with other men friends as I had done since the war, I told him about it. He would look so upset and distressed that I gave it up. In those days he telephoned me at nine every morning. Sometimes I went to the Institute early and, either because he did not get the connection or was late at his office, he would be so distressed in the evening that I soon gave up my work at the laboratory so that he would be sure always to find me at home. Thus, little by little, he monopolized my life.

He would come to the apartment to see me after lunch. When the weather was fine we walked to-

gether. I knew Paris very well, and it was a pleasure for me to point out to him the old houses, churches, museums. My bookish learning amused him. "You know the dates of all the kings of France and the telephone numbers of all the great writers," he would say, laughingly. But he enjoyed these walks. By that time, I knew what he liked; flowers on a gray wall, a corner of the Seine seen from a window of the Isle of St. Louis, a garden hidden behind a church. In the morning I would often explore the ground myself so as to be sure to take him, in the afternoon, to a place that he would like. We went to concerts, too; musically, we had much the same taste, and this was amazing to me because my musical taste had not been at all shaped by education but by emotion.

Thus we lived a kind of intimate, somewhat conjugal life, but Philippe had never told me that he loved me; he said indeed that he did not love me and that this was very fortunate for our friendship. One day, he met me unexpectedly in the Bois, as we were both taking an early morning walk. He said,

"I get such pleasure from seeing you that it seems to me I am living over again some experience of my early adult life; when I was sixteen, I used to watch in the streets of Limoges for a young woman whose name was Denise Aubry."

"Did you love her?"

"Yes, but I tired of her just as you would tire of me

if I did not myself place limits upon our happiness."

"Don't you believe that love can be shared?"

"Even when it is, love is a terrible thing. Once a woman said to me something which I thought quite true, 'A love that is successful, that jogs along, is hard enough—but one that is not is hell. . . .' That's true, I think."

I made no answer. I had decided to let myself be led, and to do just what he wanted. A few days later we went to hear "Siegfried," my favorite opera. It was a tremendous joy for me to hear it side by side with the man who had become my hero. During the "Forest Whispers," unconsciously I put my hand on his arm; he turned his head and looked at me, with a wondering and happy air. On the way home in the motor he took my hand in his, kissed it and kept it. At my door, he said, "Good night, darling," and I answered, laughingly but touched nevertheless, "Good night, my great friend." The next morning, I received a letter from him written during the night and sent by messenger, which began, "Isabelle, this exacting, unique sentiment cannot be friendship only. . . ." Then he wrote me of a few episodes of his romantic childhood, of the woman he had called "Queen" and the "Amazone" and who had remained an obsession for him:

*The type of woman who has appealed to me has always been the same: frail, unhappy, frivolous, yet good. A personality like Renée's is absolutely opposed to it.*

*But the very minute I met Odile, I knew she was the one for whom I had always waited. What more shall I tell you? You have, within yourself, some of that mysterious essence which, to me, gives life all its value and when I am deprived of it I want to die. Love? Friendship? What does the name matter? It is a profound and tender feeling, a great hope, an immense sweetness. My dear, I have a desire for your lips and for that place in your neck where my fingers may caress the little stiff brush of your bobbed hair.*

PHILIPPE.

That evening I went out with him. We had planned to hear some Russian music and to meet at Gaveau Hall. When I arrived I said, smiling, "Good evening . . . I had your letter to-day." His look was cold and he said, "Oh, you did?" then spoke of something else. But in the carriage, going home, he had my lips and that little place in the back of my neck that he had long desired.

The next Sunday we went to Fontainebleau, "You are so Wagnerian," he said, "that I should like to show you a little spot near Barbizon, which always makes me think of the Walhalla hill. Blue rocks piled under pine trees, climbing toward heaven. It is all so chaotic, gigantic and perfectly ordered, quite in the spirit of the 'Twilight of the Gods.' I know you don't care for landscapes, but you will like this one because it looks theatrical."

I wore a plain white frock, in an effort somewhat to resemble a Valkyrie. He liked it. Despite all the efforts I made, he seldom cared for my clothes. As a rule he looked at them critically and said nothing. That day he looked at me with pleasure. The forest seemed as beautiful to me as he had described it. A winding path had been worn between the moss-covered rocks. To help me climb, Philippe took my arm several times and held me when I had to jump. We lay stretched on the grass. My head rested on his shoulder. Fir trees, in a circle around us, made a sort of deep dark well opening on a blue sky.

5.

I was wondering if Philippe meant to make me his wife or his mistress. I liked even this uncertainty. He would be the dictator of my fate; the solution must come from him alone. I was awaiting it with confidence.

At times, some more precise meaning seemed to underlie his words. "I shall have to take you to Bruges . . . a delightful town . . . we've never taken a little trip together. . . ." The idea of going away with him thrilled me and I smiled tenderly, but he never mentioned it again.

July was hot and torrid. All our friends had left for the holidays; I had no desire to leave Paris, for it meant leaving Philippe. One evening we dined at

Saint-Germain. We lingered a long time on the terrace. Paris was spread at our feet, like a black sea in which sparkling stars were reflected. The laughter of couples sounded through the darkness. Voices sang in the groves. Near us, in the grass, a cricket could be heard. In the car, on the way home, he said several times, "When you come to Gandumas . . . when you know my mother well. . . ." But the word marriage was never mentioned.

The next day he went to Gandumas for a fortnight, and he wrote me often. Before coming back, he sent me the long letter of which I have spoken and which was the story of his life with Odile. It interested and astonished me. In it I discovered a new Philippe; anxious, jealous (a trait which I had never imagined), somewhat cynical also under certain circumstances. I understood that his idea had been to reveal himself to me as he was, in order to avoid unpleasant discoveries later. But the portrait that he depicted of himself did not frighten me. Why should I worry about his jealousy? I had no desire to inflame it. Why should I object to his seeing young women? I was ready to accept everything.

All he did and said showed he had made up his mind to marry me. That made me happy. Only one thing tended to spoil my pleasure. Display of irritation that I had sometimes noticed in him when he heard me talk or watched me move seemed to me to be growing

livelier and more frequent. Several times, during an evening begun in perfect spiritual communion, I would realize suddenly that at a word from me he fell into silence and sad revery. Silent, too, then I tried to recall what I had said. Everything seemed innocent enough to me. I tried to understand what could have shocked him but did not succeed. His reactions were sometimes so mysterious, and impossible to foresee.

"Do you know what you should do, Philippe? Tell me everything there is about me you don't like. There are things, I know. . . . Am I wrong?"

"No, but they are so trifling."

"I'd like to know them just the same, and I shall try to correct them."

"Very well. Next time I am away, I'll write them to you."

At the end of the month while he was spending two days at Gandumas I received this:

*Gandumas, par Chardeuil,*
*Haute-Vienne.*

| *What I Like in You:* | *What I Do Not Like:* |
|---|---|
| *You* | *Nothing* |

*Yes, this is true in a way, but not quite. Perhaps it would be better and more accurate to put the same traits in both columns, because there are certain details about you which I like as part of you, but would not like in any one else, isolated.*

| *What I like in You:* | *What I Do Not Like:* |
| --- | --- |
| *Your black eyes, your long eyelashes, the line of your neck and shoulders, your figure.* | *A sort of awkwardness in your gestures. Your air of a little girl afraid of being scolded.* |
| *Particularly, a mixture of frailty and of courage, of boldness and timidity, of modesty and ardor. There is something heroic in you, concealed beneath lack of will power in little things, but it is there, just the same.* | *Particularly a refusal to see and accept life as it is; an Anglo-Saxon magazine sort of ideal; an irritating sentimentality. Intolerance of others' faults.* |
| *The girlish side of your personality.* | *The old lady side of your personality.* |
| *Your sport clothes.* | *Your yellow tunic dress; the trimming on your hat (a blue feather); your cream lace gown; everything that is heavy and breaks the straight line.* |

| *What I Like in You:* | *What I Do Not Like:* |
|---|---|
| *Your conscientious soul; your simplicity, your method. Your books and papers in order.* | *Your thriftiness; your sentimental and bourgeois reasoning.* |
| *Your sanity.* | *Your lack of folly.* |
| *Your modesty.* | *Your lack of self-confidence.* |

*I could go on this way forever in the left-hand column; everything I put in the other is false. At least what I should write is:*

| *What I Like in You:* |
|---|
| *Everything I do not like.* |

*Because all this is part of you and I have no desire to reform you, save in the very little things which have been added to your real self. For in . . . but I have lots of work to do. Hachette have asked me to make up a special kind of paper for them for a new magazine, and one of the foremen just came in to submit an idea. How hard it is to tear myself away from a letter I am writing to you. Another sentence to add to the picture:*

| *What I Like in You:* |
|---|
| *This long and sensuous revery into which I fall as soon as I think of you.* |

*Chamfort relates that a lady once said to Chevalier de B——. "What I love in you . . . Ah, Madame," he interrupted, "if you know what it is, I am lost. . . ."*

*What I love in you — Isabelle . . .*

PHILIPPE.

This letter gave me much food for thought. I recalled certain critical looks of Philippe. I had noticed for a long time that he attached a curious importance not only to everything I said, but closely observed my dresses, my hats, every detail of my appearance. This had saddened, almost hurt me. To my astonishment I discovered in myself some of my mother's ways of thinking and her instinctive contempt of luxury, and it disturbed me to find that my hero, Philippe, gave so much thought to those things. I could understand that he should be different from me, but I found it unworthy of him that he should concern himself greatly with such trifles. That was his nature, though, and I wanted to please him. I had made efforts to be as he wanted me to be but I had not quite succeeded, and what was most disturbing to me now was that I did not see clearly what he wanted. My thrift? My lack of madness? Certainly that was true. I was moderate and prudent. "How strange," I thought, "during all my childhood I was a romantic little soul, rebelling against an austere and too conventional environment and now Philippe, looking at me from the outside, seems to discover in me many hereditary traits that I thought

I did not have." Reading and rereading the letter I found excuses, despite myself, "Your air of a little girl fearful that she will be scolded. . . ." How could I avoid having this air, Philippe? You can't imagine how severely I was brought up. I could never leave the house without Mademoiselle or mother. . . . Your Odile, Philippe, spent her youth with indifferent parents who left her quite free . . . and this had made you suffer much. . . . My irritating sentimentality? I know, but no one around me was at all sentimental. . . . I want love to be like a warm climate, tender, which my family refused to give me. . . . My modesty? . . . My lack of vanity? . . . How could I have developed self-assurance when throughout my childhood I heard that I was full of faults, mediocre, plain. . . . When Philippe returned, I tried to explain these things to him, but he smiled and was so tender that I soon forgot his letter. We agreed on a day for our wedding and I was radiantly happy.

My parents had returned for the occasion. Philippe was not unattractive to them. He liked my father's distant cynicism and told me that my mother's severity had a very poetical "Marcenat" side to it. My family could not get over the fact that we took no wedding trip. I should have liked to take one; to see Greece or Italy with Philippe would have been a great joy for me, but I sensed he had no desire to do so and I did not insist. I understood his feeling, but my parents were quite anxious that we should observe the "etiquette

of happiness," and mother predicted a dangerous future for our union. "Don't let your husband believe you love him too much," she warned me, "or you are doomed." I had developed during these last few months and I answered, somewhat curtly, "I'll watch over my own happiness."

6.

Our first three months of married life remain with me as the most harmonious of memories. The perfect joy of living with Philippe, the gradual awakening of love; bodily communion; the delicacy of his kindness, his thoughtfulness. How charming and easy everything seemed to be with you, Philippe! I would have wished to efface from your memory all the sad recollections, to give you every joy, to sit at your feet, kiss your hands. I felt so young. My repressed childhood, my war work, the horror of being a lonely woman, all were forgotten; life was perfect.

We spent these first three months at Gandumas which I loved very much. I had wanted to know this house, this park where Philippe had grown up. I thought of him as a child, as a little boy, with profound tenderness in which sensuousness and maternal feeling blended. My mother-in-law showed me his photographs, schoolbooks, and locks of hair that she had kept. I found her understanding and intelligent. We had many tastes in common and we had the same

timidity, a tender and anxious fear, confronted as we were with a Philippe so difficult, so different from the one she had brought up.

She said that Odile's influence over him had been great and not particularly beneficial.

"He never was restless and nervous before his marriage," she said. "He had a determined and orderly mind. He loved his books, and his work, and he was like his father who, above all, was a slave to duty. Under the influence of his wife, Philippe became much more . . . complex. Oh, on the surface, of course; fundamentally his nature is the same, but I would not be astonished if you should find him, at first, somewhat hard to manage."

I made her talk of Odile. She had never forgiven her for having made Philippe unhappy.

"But, Mother, he adored her and he still loves her; that shows she brought him some happiness at least."

"I believe that he is going to be much happier with you, and I am very grateful to you for that, Isabelle."

We had many conversations which would have seemed strange to a listening outsider because it was I who undertook the defense of the mythical Odile whom Philippe had created and shown to me.

"You astonish me, yes, indeed, you do. You seem to have known her better than I did, and yet you never spoke a word to her. No, I assure you, I have only the profoundest pity for the poor little thing,

but to be truthful, I must describe her to you as I knew her."

Time passed with amazing rapidity; life seemed to have begun for me the day I married. In the morning, before leaving for the mill, Philippe chose books for me to read. Some of them, especially the philosophers, I found quite difficult, but when it was a question of love I read them with joy. I copied in a little notebook the sentences which Philippe had marked on the margin.

Toward eleven, I would go into the park. I loved to accompany my mother-in-law to the model little garden city which she had built on the slopes of the Loire banks, as a monument to her husband's memory. It was a group of clean sanitary houses which Philippe considered hideous, but which were comfortable and spacious. Madame Marcenat had made of it a social center which interested me. She showed me the manual-training school, the hospital, the nursery. I helped her. My war experience served me well, and I had a natural taste for organization and order.

I found greater pleasure still in going to the mill with Philippe. In a few days I became familiar with his work; it amused me. I loved to sit opposite him in his office, his desk heaped with paper of all colors, to read the letters of newspaper publishers and editors, and to listen to what the workmen who came in had to say. Sometimes, when all the employees had gone, I would sit on his knee and he, keeping his eye on the door, would kiss me. I realized with joy that he

wanted me near him constantly and when I drew near he would put his hand on my shoulder or his arm around my waist. I discovered that the most intense and real side of his make-up was that of the lover, and I liked to feel a glow of sensuality pervade me, of which I had been entirely unconscious, but which colored my whole life now.

Arid as the country was, I loved it, for I felt that it was impregnated with Philippe. The only place I avoided was the observatory in the park where I knew he had gone first with Denise Aubry, later with Odile. I began to experience a strange and posthumous jealousy. At times I was devoured by curiosity. I questioned Philippe about Odile with almost cruel determination. But these moods were fleeting, and I was sorry when I discovered that Philippe's happiness was not due to the same causes as mine. He loved me. I knew that, but he had not, as I had, a marvelous gratitude for this new life.

"Philippe," I'd say to him sometimes, "I am so happy I could cry."

"Good heavens, how young you are!" he would reply.

7.

We returned to Paris in early November. I had told Philippe I wanted to keep the apartment in my parents' house that I had occupied before my marriage.

"It would be ideal, I think. No rent to pay, it's

all furnished, quite large enough for both of us, and my family won't be in the way during the few weeks they spend in Paris every year. Of course, later, if they should live in Paris all the time and occupy the house, we'll look around and find another. There will be plenty of time."

Philippe would not hear of it.

"At times you are queer, Isabelle. I couldn't possibly live in that house; it's ugly, horribly decorated. Those impossible plaster moldings on walls and ceilings! Your family will never allow us to do it over. No, I assure you it would be a great mistake. I would not be happy in our home. . . ."

"Not even with me, Philippe? Don't you believe that the important thing in life is the people who live in the house, not the way it is furnished?"

"Of course, one can always say these things, and they seem just and true. . . . But if we start off with superficial sentimentality, we're doomed. . . . If you say, 'not even with me,' I have to answer, 'I could live anywhere with you, dear,' only I know it is not true, and I know I would not be happy in that house."

I gave in, but I meant to move the furniture which my family had given me into the new apartment which Philippe had taken.

"Now see here, Isabelle dear, what is there that is worth keeping? Possibly a few white enamel chairs for the bathroom, a kitchen table, and if you insist, some linen chests. All the rest is hideous."

I was heartbroken. I knew that those pieces of furniture were not beautiful, but I had seen them all my life and I liked them; rather, I felt at ease with them and, more than that, I thought it sheer madness to buy new ones when we had those. I knew that mother would scold me when she came back, and I also knew that deep in my heart I would agree with her.

"What shall we do with it then, Philippe?"

"Sell it, dear."

"You know how hard it is to sell anything without great loss. The moment you want to sell anything everybody tells you it isn't worth a cent."

"I know, but after all it isn't worth a cent. The dining-room set is not even genuine Henri II; it astonishes me, Isabelle, that you should want to keep those horrors that you did not even choose yourself."

"I suppose I am wrong, Philippe. Do just what you think best."

Scenes of this nature recurred so frequently and as the result of such trifles, that finally I laughed at them, but in Philippe's notebook I found this entry:

*I know, of course, that all this is of no importance. Isabelle is so perfect in other ways; her self-denial, her desire to make every one happy who lives with her. She has absolutely transformed mother's life at Gandumas. . . . Perhaps because she herself has no great positive needs, she seems to be constantly trying to find out mine and satisfy them. I can't express one*

*desire without having her come home at night with a package containing its realization. She spoils me as one spoils a child, as I spoiled Odile. But I feel, with some sadness and great apprehension that all this kindness tends rather to alienate me than to bring me closer. I hate myself for it. I struggle against it, but I can't help it. What I need is . . . what? What has happened? I think I know because it always happens to me. I tried to incarnate my Queen and my "Amazone" in Isabelle, and a measure of Odile too, for her memory blends with the "Amazone." But Isabelle is not that sort of woman. I have given her a part which she cannot play. The tragedy of it is that I know it, that I try to love her as she is, that I realize she is worthy of being loved, and that I am wretched.*

*But why, great heavens, why? I possess one of the rarest of good fortunes: a great love. I spent all my life begging for it, wishing to live a successful romance. Now I have it and I don't want it. I love Isabelle, but with her I feel affectionately though hopelessly bored. Now I realize how tiresome I must have been to Odile. This boredom is no fault of Isabelle as it is no fault of mine, because it is in no way due to shallowness of mind of the person who loves us. It is due simply to the fact that, satisfied by the beloved one, she does not seek to fill her life and to make every minute of it live; she has no need to do so. . . . Last night, Isabelle and I spent the whole evening in the library. I did not want to read. I wanted to go out,*

*see people, do something. Isabelle, happy, raised her eyes from her book once in a while and smiled at me.*

Oh, Philippe, silent soul! Why did you not speak? I knew full well the feelings of which you kept secret notes. You would not have hurt me if you had said these things to me. Indeed, you might have cured me. Perhaps if we had said everything to one another, we might have met halfway. I knew I was foolish when I said to you, "Each minute with you is precious . . . to get into the car with you . . . to seek and meet your eyes at the table . . . to hear you slam the door as you come in." It is true that I had one fixed idea: to be alone with you. Looking at you and listening to you were sufficient for me. I had no desire to see new people; I feared them, but had I known that you had so much need of them, perhaps I should have been otherwise.

8.

Philippe wanted me to know his friends. I was astonished to find he had so many. I don't know why I had imagined and hoped to find that he lived a more secluded and restricted life. Every Saturday he spent the late afternoon at Madame de Thianges' who seemed to be his great confidante, and he was also very fond of her sister, Madame Antoine Quesnay. I liked the atmosphere of her salon, but I did not feel at ease there. Despite myself, I clung to Philippe. I could

see that he was sometimes irritated to find me constantly in the same group with him, but I could not avoid following him.

All the women I met there were charming to me, but I had no desire to become intimate with them. Their poise and self-assurance impressed me, but they also embarrassed me. I was particularly astonished to see how intimate they were with Philippe. Between them and him there was a sort of chumminess which I had never seen in my own family. When Françoise Quesnay was alone in Paris, Philippe took her out, as he did Yvonne Prévost, the wife of a naval officer, and a young woman named Thérèse de Saint-Cast who wrote poetry and who was very unattractive to me. It all seemed very innocent; they went to art exhibits, occasionally to a cinema, and on Sunday afternoons to a concert. At first he had asked me to go along and I went several times. But I was not amused. On those occasions Philippe manifested an alertness and animation that he had in other days displayed toward me. Now it was painful for me to witness his joy, and I was particularly unhappy to see him interested in so many women. It seems to me that I could have borne it more cheerfully had he been consumed by one dominating, irresistible passion. Doubtless it would have been agony and possibly more dangerous for the peace of our union, but at least the pain would have been proportionate to my love. It hurt me to see the man who was my hero give so much of himself to women

who, to be sure, were very attractive though I found them quite ordinary. One day I dared say to him,

"Philippe dear, I'd give a lot to understand you. What pleasure do you have in seeing Yvonne Prévost? She is not your mistress, you tell me, and I believe you; so what does she mean to you? Do you think she is intelligent? She bores me more than any one I know."

"Yvonne? Oh, no, she is not a bore. I get pleasure talking to her of things she knows. Her father was a naval officer and so is her husband; she knows about ships and seas. Last spring I spent a few days with her and her husband in the south. We swam and sailed: it was great fun. . . . And then, too, she is cheerful, she has a good figure and she is nice to look at. What more do you want?"

"For you? Much, much more. . . . Don't you understand, dear, I think you are worthy of the best of women, and I see you hovering about pretty, commonplace little creatures. . . ."

"How unfair and intolerant of you! Hélène and Françoise are both exceptional women; and then they are old friends of mine. Before the war, when I was ill, Hélène was devotion itself. She looked after me, saved my life perhaps. You certainly are queer, Isabelle. What do you want me to do? To break with the rest of the world so as to remain alone with you? After a few days I'd be bored to death—and so would you!"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't. I am ready to lock myself

up in a prison with you for the rest of my days. Only you could not bear it."

"Neither could you, Isabelle dear. You wish it, because you haven't it; if I made you lead that sort of life, you'd hate it in no time."

"Just try it, dear, and you'll see. I've an idea. Christmas will soon be here; let's take a trip somewhere alone. I'd love it and you know we didn't have a wedding trip."

"With the greatest pleasure. Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere you say, I have no preference so long as I am with you."

Finally we decided to spend a few days in the mountains and I wrote to St. Moritz for rooms.

The thought of this trip made me happy, but Philippe remained gloomy.

*I feel cynical and sad when I notice how rarely two human beings are on the same level. In this comedy of love we play in turn the part of the most beloved and the part of the least beloved. The same words are uttered, but by different lips. It is my turn now. When I come in after a long day, I have to explain in detail what I have done every hour. Isabelle tries hard not to be jealous, but I know too much about the disease not to recognize it. Poor Isabelle! I pity her, but I can't cure her. When I think of the innocence of my daily life, of the actual work that is done in the time that seems to her so mysteriously occupied, I can't help*

*thinking of Odile. What would I not have given in other days to have Odile attach such importance to my actions. But alas, if I wished it so, was it not because she was indifferent to them . . . ?*

*The more we live together, the more I realize how opposed our tastes are. In the evening, I often ask Isabelle to go out with me, to try a new restaurant, to go to a cinema or a theater. She accepts with such reluctance that I am tired of the evening before it begins.*

*"All right, if you don't want to go let's stay home."*

*"If you don't mind," she says, relieved, "I'd really much rather stay home."*

*When I go out with friends, her lack of interest freezes me. It seems to me I am responsible for it and that makes me very miserable.*

*"It's very strange," I say to her, "that you don't seem able to enjoy an amusing hour or so."*

*"It all seems so idle and vain to me," she replies, "I feel I am wasting my time when I have lovely books at home to read, or things to do in the house. But if it amuses you I am quite ready to go."*

*"No, it does not amuse me any more," I answer with irritation.*

A few months later he wrote,

*Summer evening. I don't know how I succeeded in dragging Isabelle to the Neuilly Fair. Around us*

*the merry-go-round organs played negro tunes; we could hear the shots in the galleries and see the wheel of the lotteries spinning; there was a smell of hot waffles in the air. A dense crowd pushed us about. I don't know why I felt happy. I love this noise, this crowd, this excitement. I find in it a real, though obscure poetry. I think of these men and women going so swiftly to their death, and yet they spend time trying to throw a ring around the neck of a bottle, trying to make a nigger dummy pop up with one blow of the mallet. It may be that their philosophy is right: in view of the oblivion that awaits us, Napoleon and Richelieu did no better with their lives than this little wisp of a woman, or this soldier at the fair.*

*In my meditation, I had forgotten Isabelle. She suddenly grasped my arm and said,*

*"Let's go home, dear. All this wearies me so."*

*I called a taxi and while we were making our way through the jostling crowd, I was thinking,*

*"How amusing and charming such an evening would have been with Odile. She would have had that luminous expression in her eyes that she always had when she was happy; she would have taken a chance at every wheel and would have been pleased to win any worthless trifle. Poor Odile who loved life so much and knew so little about it, while Isabelle and I for instance keep on living with no particular desire to do so. We are really children of death—Odile was the child of life."*

*Isabelle, who seemed to guess my thoughts, put her hand in mine,*

*"Are you ill?" I asked her. "You are so rarely tired."*

*"Not a bit, but I do so hate a fair; it tires me more quickly than anything else."*

*"I am sorry it bores you . . . I love it so."*

*Then, suddenly, perhaps because at that very moment a merry-go-round organ played an old tune, I remembered some words that Odile had said to me, years before, as we walked through these very grounds. At that time it was I who had complained of being bored. Had I changed so completely? Just as a house forsaken by those who built and furnished it, bought by other people, retains the atmosphere of the first owners, thus I, filled with Odile's memory, carry through life a soul which is not quite my own. My real tastes, my restless Marcenat mind, are an integral part of Isabelle's make-up, and it is strange to think that I condemned in her, that evening, the very intolerance and dislike of idle pleasure which had been characteristic of me and which Odile had destroyed in me.*

9.

We were soon to leave for the mountains. The week before we were to go, Philippe met at Hélène de Thianges' house a couple whom he had known in Morocco, the Villiers. I am trying to find a word

that would describe Madame Villier, but I cannot. She was proud, possibly, but she had the look of a conqueror, too. That's the word, I think, she was victorious. Under a mass of blonde hair, the outline of her face was clean-cut; she reminded one of a beautiful, thoroughbred animal. She came forward to greet us as soon as we entered the room.

"Your husband and I once took a delightful trip through the Atlas Mountains. . . . Marcenat, do you remember Said? . . . Said," she said turning to me, "was our guide. A bright-eyed little Arab urchin."

"He was a poet, too," Philippe said. "When we took him into the carriage with us, he would sing of the speed of the Roumis and of the beauty of Madame Villier."

"Aren't you taking your wife to Morocco this year?"

"No, we are only taking a very short trip this time; to the mountains. Aren't you tempted to go?"

"Are you serious, really? . . . Yes, my husband and I thought we would spend Christmas and New Year's in the snow. Where have you decided to go?"

"To St. Moritz," Philippe answered.

I was furious; I made signs to him which he did not see. Finally, I got up, saying,

"Philippe, we must be going."

"We must? Why?"

"I told the house-agent to come in to-day."

"On Saturday?"

"Yes, I thought it would be more convenient for you."

He looked at me with an astonished expression and got up without a word.

"If the trip appeals to you," he said to Madame Villier, "call me on the telephone and we'll plan it together; it will be jolly to make a foursome of it, I think."

When we were out of the house, he said to me, sharply,

"Why the devil did you make an appointment for six o'clock on Saturday? You know perfectly well it is Hélène's day at home, and that I love to go there and stay late."

"But I have not made any appointment with any one, Philippe. I wanted to get away."

"How queer! Aren't you feeling well?"

"Yes, but I don't want those Villier people to go with us on our trip. Philippe, I can't make you out. You know perfectly well that the whole joy of this brief holiday for me is to spend it alone with you, and you invite people you hardly know, whom you have seen once in Morocco. . . ."

"How excited you are about it! The Villiers are not people whom I scarcely know. I spent a fortnight with them. I had many delightful evenings in their Marrakech home. You can't imagine how perfect the house is, and the garden. Pools, fountains, cypress trees, the smell of flowers. . . . Solange Villier has

exquisite taste; everything is arranged so beautifully; nothing but Algerian divans and thick carpets in the house. . . . Really, I was more intimate with the Villiers than with many of our Paris friends whom we meet at dinners three times every winter."

"All right, Philippe. I may be entirely wrong, but please let me have my little trip. It's mine . . . you promised it to me. . . ."

Philippe put his hand in mine and laughed.

"All right. My Lady shall have her trip."

The next day, while we were taking coffee after lunch, Madame Villier telephoned Philippe. I understood from the answers he gave that she had discussed the plan with her husband, that he approved of it and that they would both go to Switzerland with us. I noticed that Philippe did not insist, and even went so far as to discourage them. But his last words were, "Good enough, we'll be delighted to meet you there."

He hung up the receiver and looked at me sheepishly.

"You saw for yourself, I did all I could."

"Yes, but do you mean to tell me they are really going? Oh, Philippe, it is more than I can bear."

"But what else could I do, my dear? I could not be rude to them, could I?"

"No, but you could have made some excuse; you could even have told them we had decided to go somewhere else."

"Yes, but they would have gone there too. It is silly, Isabelle, for you to turn this episode into a tragedy. You'll see they are very nice, and they'll make delightful traveling companions."

"All right, then, Philippe. Do something for me: go alone with them. I have lost all interest in the trip."

"You're mad. They'll wonder what it's all about. And I tell you quite frankly I think it most ungracious of you. I have no desire to leave Paris; you asked me to do it; I did it just to please you, and now you ask me to go alone."

"Not alone, Philippe . . . with your dearest friends."

"Isabelle, I am sick of this ridiculous scene," he said with a violence I had never before noticed in him. "I've not done anything wrong, I did not invite the Villiers; they invited themselves. Furthermore, they are absolutely indifferent to me. I have never flirted with Solange. I am fed up with this," he went on shouting his words and walking back and forth in the dining room. "You're so jealous, so suspicious that I don't dare say a word, or make a move. . . . Nothing kills life more quickly, I assure you. . . ."

"The thing that kills life, I assure you, is to share it with everybody."

I listened to myself astonished. I realized I was sarcastic, antagonistic. I was irritating the only human

being in the whole world that I loved, and I could not help doing it.

"Poor Isabelle!" Philippe said.

And I, knowing his past life so well from what he had told me, living with his memories more intensely perhaps than he did himself, I could see that he was thinking, "Poor Isabelle, you too in turn . . ."

I did not sleep much that night. I cross-examined myself mercilessly. What real wrong had I done? Certainly, there could be no intimacy between my husband and Solange Villier; they had not seen one another for such a long time. I had no excuse for jealousy. Perhaps this very encounter would, after all, be a stroke of good luck. I doubt if Philippe would have enjoyed himself alone with me at St. Moritz. He would come back to Paris, dissatisfied, with the feeling that I had forced him to make a stupid and dull journey, whereas with the Villiers he would be happy and some of his pleasure would be reflected in me. But I was heartbroken nevertheless.

10.

We had planned to leave a day ahead of the Villiers, but it was not convenient, so we all took the same train. The next morning Philippe got up early and, when I stepped out of our compartment, I saw him standing in the passageway engrossed in conversation with Solange. I was struck by their expression of happiness.

When I approached them and said, "Good morning," Solange turned around, and I wondered if she looked at all like Odile; no, she did not. She was much more robust, and her features were less childish, less angelic. Solange looked like a woman who had taken life's measure and won out. When she smiled, I liked her for a moment. Soon her husband joined us. The train was passing between two high mountains, and a stream bordered the railway tracks. It was unreal and depressing, I thought. Jacques Villier talked to me of boring things. I knew, because every one said it, that he was intelligent; not only had he made a great success in Morocco, but he had become an important figure in the business world. "He has a finger in every pie," Philippe had said to me, "in phosphates, in docks, in mines." The truth is I was trying to hear what Philippe and Solange were saying, but the noise of the train drowned half of it. I heard Solange say, "Well, how do you define charm, what is it?" Then Philippe, ". . . very complex . . . the face has something to do with it, and the body . . . but particularly . . . simplicity . . ." and then a word escaped me. Then Solange continued, "Taste, also, imagination, an adventurous mind, don't you think?"

"That's it. It's a combination of things. . . . A woman must be capable of seriousness and childishness . . . the thing I find unbearable . . ."

Once more, the noise of the train made me lose half the rest. The mountains were getting higher and

higher. Hewn wood, glistening with resin, was piled up neatly near a little cottage whose roof looked like a big hood. Was I going to suffer this agony for a whole week? Jacques Villier ended a long monologue,

"So you see how interesting the whole operation is. It's superb in every way."

And then he chuckled; he had just explained to me, I suppose, a very clever piece of business. All that I heard was two words, "Godet group."

"Superb, indeed," I answered, and I could see that he thought I was stupid, but I did not care; I was beginning to hate him.

The end of that journey seems to me now like a nightmare. The little puffing engine climbed painfully through a setting of glittering whiteness, and was enveloped now and then with clouds of smoke which hovered for a moment above the snow. It followed wide, mysterious curves which caused the white fir-crowned peaks to circle around us. Suddenly, we would see a deep abyss yawning by our side, and realize that the sharp black curve at its very bottom was the track we had just left.

Solange was looking at all this with the happiness of a child, and was constantly calling Philippe's attention to details of the landscape.

"Look, Marcenat, how gorgeous those long flat branches are, to which the snow clings so gracefully. . . . That wood must be very strong to bear

all that weight without breaking. And there, look at the hotel, glistening up there in the sunlight just like a diamond in a white satin box. . . . And the play of the colors upon the snow. Look, do you see, it is never really white, now bluish . . . white . . . then pink. . . . Oh, Marcenat, if you knew how I love it all!"

It was all harmless enough and, when I think of it without prejudice, I must admit that she said it with a certain charm. But it got on my nerves. I was amazed that Philippe, who loved simplicity above everything, should be impressed by such lyrical outbursts.

"Well," I thought, "she may be happy, but at her age—after all, at thirty-three, five perhaps—her neck shows it—she can't be bursting with happiness like a child. . . . And then we can all see the snow is pinkish or bluish, so why talk about it?"

It seemed to me that Jacques Villier was thinking the same thoughts, because now and then he would reply to his wife's remarks with an ironic, somewhat wearied "y-es." I liked him for a moment when he said, "y-es."

I could not make out the Villier couple. They were courteous enough to one another. She treated him with a sort of affectionate familiarity, called him Jacquot or Jacquou, and kissed him without any particular reason, a little peck, and yet after spending a few hours with them, it was quite apparent they were

not in love with one another and that Villier was not jealous of her. He seemed to accept, with a kind of superior resignation, any mad idea his wife might have. For whom did he live? For another woman? For his mines, his boats, his Morocco plantations? I could not guess, nor did I have enough interest to go on trying. I despised him for being so complacent. "He does not want to be here any more than I do," I thought, "and if he had more determination, none of us would be here." Philippe had bought a Swiss newspaper and was trying to convert the Stock Exchange quotations into French francs, and thinking it would be agreeable to Villier, he talked of stocks to him. With a gesture of fatigue, Villier pushed away the mention of the foreign names, Greek or Mexican industries, just as a famous writer does when a flatterer quotes his books to him. Turning to me, he asked if I had read *Koenigsmark*. And all the time the little train was winding around soft, white masses.

Why should St. Moritz remain in my memory as a stage setting of a de Musset comedy, gay, unreal, but gravely sad? I can see our departure from the railway station at night; the lights on the snow; the bitter, yet wholesome cold; the sledges, the mules with bells and red, yellow and blue frills on their harnesses. Then, the grateful warmth of the hotel, Englishmen in dinner jackets in the lobby, and our large, warm bedroom. Most of all, I recall the happiness of being

at last alone with my husband for a few minutes.

"Kiss me, Philippe. We must dedicate this room. . . . I would have loved so to dine alone with you, here, and instead of that we'll have to get dressed, meet people, talk, talk, talk."

"But they are very nice people."

"Very nice . . . if one does not have to see them."

"How intolerant you are! Didn't you think Solange was delightful during the journey?"

"Philippe, you might as well admit it, you're in love with her."

"Not on your life, I'm not. Why should I be?"

"Because if you were not, you could not stand her five minutes. What did she say? Can you find a single idea in anything she said this morning . . . ?"

"Certainly. . . . She feels nature keenly. She spoke of the snow in a charming way, and of the trees. . . . Don't you think she did?"

"Yes, she makes a good picture now and then; so do I, for that matter; so do all women if they let themselves go . . . it's the natural way for them to think. . . . The great difference between Solange and me is that I think too much of you to tell you all that goes on in my mind. . . ."

"My dear," he said with affectionate irony, "I have never doubted either your capacity to think very nice things, nor denied the modesty that prevents you from saying them. . . ."

"Don't laugh at me, dear, I mean it. . . . If you

were not a little attracted by this young woman, you'd readily see how incoherent she is, how she jumps from one thing to another. Isn't it true that you are? Be honest, now."

"It is not true at all!" Philippe replied.

II.

Retrospectively, this holiday in St. Moritz seems to me a horrible agony. Before I went I knew I was naturally clumsy in every kind of sport or physical exercise; but I thought Philippe and I would try out skiing or tobogganing together, as beginners, and that it would be amusing. The very first morning I discovered that Solange was extremely clever at them all. Philippe, though not as fit as she was, was supple and graceful; off they went on their skates together, happy, while I dragged myself around laboriously, assisted by a "pro."

After dinner we went into the lobby; Philippe and Solange drew their chairs close together and talked all evening, while I had to listen to Jacques Villier discuss finance. It was the time when the English pound was worth sixty francs, and I remember he said,

"You know, that's way below the real value of the pound. You should tell your husband to invest at least some of his money in foreign securities, because, don't you know . . ."

Then he spoke of his mistresses, by name,

"I suppose you've heard that I have been playing around with Jenny Sorbier, the actress? Well, that's all over. I loved her immensely, but I don't any more. Madame Lhauterie took her place. Do you know her? She is a beautiful creature—and so sweet. . . . A man like me who is constantly harassed by business must find calm and natural tenderness in a woman. . . ."

And all the time I was trying to draw near Philippe and start a general conversation. When I succeeded, the hopeless opposition of Solange's philosophy of life and mine was immediately apparent. Solange's pet topic was adventure. That's what she called the search for hazardous and unexpected things. She claimed to loathe comfort, both moral and material.

"I'm glad I am a woman," she said to me one evening. "A woman has so many more possibilities than a man."

"How so? A man has his career; he has a wide field of activity."

"Yes, a man has one career, but a woman can live the career of all the men she loves. An army officer brings her war, a sailor the sea, an ambassador diplomacy, a writer the joys of creation. . . . She can experience the thrills of ten different lives without the boredom of living any one of them."

"But that's horrible. It presupposes that she loves ten different men."

"And that they are all intelligent, which is most unlikely," said Villier, emphasizing the word "most."

"Yes, that's true, but women are so much less individual than men; they have so little to offer."

One day, I was quite disconcerted by an answer she made, and the tone in which she said it. She had spoken of the happiness that accompanies any escape from civilization, and I had said,

"Why should one escape it, if one is happy?"

"Because happiness is never immobile; happiness is a respite in anxiety."

"Very true," said Villier, and it astonished me to hear him say it.

Then Philippe, in an effort to please Solange, took up the idea and said,

"Oh, yes, how true! . . . it would be delightful to escape. . . ."

And Solange replied,

"You? Escape? You are the last person in the world who really wishes to escape."

That hurt me, for Philippe.

Solange liked to stir the vanity of others by a touch of the whip. As soon as Philippe displayed affection for me or said anything kind, she would grow sarcastic. Most of the time she and Philippe looked like an engaged couple. Every morning she came down in a new sweater, in bright colors—and each time Philippe would whisper to her, "What perfect taste you have." Toward the end of our holiday, he had

become quite intimate with her. What hurt me particularly was the tone of their voices when they spoke to one another, tender, familiar, and the way he helped her into her coat was like a caress. She knew she attracted him and she was making use of her power. She had much of the cat in her. When she came down to dinner, in evening dress, I thought I could see electricity gliding in waves along her naked back. When we were again in our room, I could not refrain from asking, without bitterness,

"You love her, don't you, Philippe?"

"Whom, dear?"

"Solange, of course."

"Great heavens, no!"

"Yet you look as though you did."

"I do? In what way?" And in his heart he was delighted.

I would give him my impressions in detail; he listened indulgently. I noticed that as soon as Solange was discussed, Philippe was always interested in my conversation. The day before we left, I said,

"They're a queer couple, just the same. He told me that he spends six months of the year in Morocco, and that his wife goes there every two years for three months. Then she must spend entire seasons in Paris alone. If you had to live in Indo-China or in Kamchatka, I'd go along, just as a dog would go. . . . That would bore you horribly, wouldn't it, Philippe . . . ? After all, she is right."

"You mean she has found the best way not to bore him?"

"Is that a hint for Isabelle?"

"How sensitive you are! It is not a hint for any one. I am simply stating a fact: Villier adores his wife."

"That's what she tells you, Philippe."

"In any case, he admires her."

"And pays no attention to her."

"Why should he?" He was beginning to be irritated. "I have never heard it rumored that she does not behave correctly."

"Oh, Philippe! I have not known her three weeks and I have heard the names of three of her ex-lovers."

"One says that about every woman," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

I felt that I was yielding to mean, contemptible thoughts, quite foreign to me. Then, as I was not really bad at heart, I took myself in hand and made great efforts to be kind to Solange; I walked with Villier so that she could be alone with Philippe on the skating rink. I was desperately anxious for this holiday to end, but I would not have said a word that might bring it to a close.

12.

When we returned to Paris, Philippe found that the general manager of his office was ill, and he had to

give more time to business than usual. Frequently, he did not come home to lunch. I wondered if he was seeing Solange Villier, but I did not dare ask him. On Saturdays, at the Thianges', when Solange was there, Philippe would rush to her, take her into a corner and never leave her. That, I thought, might be construed as a good sign. Had he met her frequently during the week he might have pretended to avoid her on Saturday. I could not help talking of her to other women; I never said anything unkind about her, but I listened carefully. She had the reputation of being an incurable flirt. Maurice de Thianges, who was sitting near me one evening, said in a half-whisper, as Jacques Villier was coming in,

"Fancy his still being here! I should have thought that his wife would have sent him back to his Atlas Mountains sooner." Nearly every one who spoke of Villier said, "Poor fellow!"

Hélène de Thianges, who was Solange's friend and with whom I often discussed her, made a portrait of her that was both beautiful and disquieting.

"Above all else, Solange is a beautiful animal with very powerful instincts. When Villier was very poor, she loved him passionately because he was so handsome. That was courageous on her part. She is the daughter of a Count de Vaulges, a well-connected Picardy family; she was gorgeously handsome; she could have married any one but she preferred going to Morocco with Villier. At first their life there was

that of the poor colonist, horribly hard. During an illness of Villier, Solange kept the books and paid the workmen herself. As she has the proud spirit of the Vaulges, she must have suffered tremendously living such a life. Yet she played the game. In this respect, she has the qualities of an honest person. But she has two great faults, or weaknesses, if you prefer; she is extremely sensuous, and she must always win. For instance, she says (not to men, but to women) that when she wants a particular man, she always gets him, and it is true. She has had the most diversified lot of men in her life!"

"She has had many lovers, has she?"

"You know how difficult it is to say that. All that one knows is that a man and a woman see much of one another. Are they lovers? Who knows? When I say she has had many different kinds of men I mean that she takes such possession of their minds that they become dependent upon her; she feels she can order them about, do you see what I mean?"

"Do you think she is intelligent?"

"Very, for a woman. . . . Yes, nothing is alien to her. Of course, her interests vary with the man she loves. When she was keen on her husband, she was up on economic and colonial questions; when it was Raymond Berger, she was passionately devoted to art. She has exquisite taste. Her house in Morocco is a marvel, and her Fontainebleau home is original and quite delightful. She is of the lover type rather than

the intellectual. But just the same, when she is in a sober mood she has admirable judgment."

"What is the explanation of her charm, do you think, Hélène?"

"She is intensely feminine."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, she is a mixture of qualities, bad and good; affection, boundless devotion to the man she loves, for a time, but also absolute lack of scruples. . . . When Solange plays the coquette she tramples upon any one, even her best friend. It is not exactly wickedness, it is instinctive."

"I call it wickedness. You might as well say a tiger is not wicked when he eats a man, because it is instinctive."

"That's exactly it. A tiger is not wicked, at least not consciously so . . . what you've just said is quite to the point; Solange is a tigress."

"She looks so sweet, though."

"Do you think so? She isn't, though. There are traces of hardness in her; that is one of the elements of her beauty."

Other women were less indulgent. Old Madame de Thianges, Hélène's mother-in-law, said to me,

"No, I can't say I like your friend Madame Villier. . . . She made the life of one of my nephews a tragedy. He was a delightful boy who had been horribly wounded in the war. When he recovered he was given a position in Paris. That was as it should

be. . . . She conquered him, made him absolutely mad for her, then left him for another. . . . Poor Armand did everything to get back to the front, and finally was killed stupidly, in an airplane accident . . . I won't have her in my house. . . ."

I did not mean to tell this gossip to Philippe but I always ended by telling. He remained impervious.

"Very likely it is true. The chances are she has had lovers. It's her right and surely none of our business."

Then, after a few words, he became irritable.

"Anyway, I should be very much astonished if she were unfaithful to her husband for she leads such an open life. One may telephone her at any hour of the day; she is always at home and usually free to see one. A woman who has a lover is as a rule much more secretive."

"But how do you know all that, Philippe? Do you telephone her? Do you go to see her?"

"Occasionally, yes."

13.

A little later, I had proof that though they saw much of one another their intimacy was innocent. One morning, after Philippe had gone to his office, a letter came which I could not answer without consulting him. So I telephoned him. It happened that I was put on his busy wire. He was talking to Solange Villier.

I recognized her voice and his. I should have rung off but I did not have the courage to do so, and I listened in for a few minutes. Their tone was gay; Philippe was amusing, witty! I had never heard him more so, indeed I had almost forgotten he could be. I preferred the grave and melancholy Philippe whom Renée had depicted to me and whom I had known immediately after the war, but I knew also this quite different man who was saying light and charming things to Solange. What I heard was reassuring. They were telling one another what they had done the past two days and what they had read. Philippe gave her the gist of a play we had seen the day before, and Solange asked,

"Did Isabelle like it?"

"Yes, I believe she did, quite. . . . How do you feel to-day? You looked pale at the Thianges' last Saturday; I don't like to see you looking that way."

That proved they had not seen one another since Saturday and it was Wednesday. Suddenly, I felt ashamed and hung up. I wondered how I could ever have listened in. It is just as bad as opening a letter addressed to another. It seemed to me the woman who could do such a thing was foreign to me. Fifteen minutes later I telephoned Philippe.

"I am sorry, I telephoned before and you were talking. I recognized Solange's voice and I rang off."

"Yes," he said without embarrassment, "she telephoned me."

All this seemed convincing and satisfying, and for a while I was calm. Soon I found in Philippe's conduct evidence of Solange's influence. In the first place, he went out two or three evenings a week; I did not ask him where he was going, but I knew that they were seen together. She had many women enemies who, seeing in me a natural ally, tried to take me into their camp. The good ones (I mean as good as one woman can be to another) treated me with silent pity and referred to my misfortune only by innuendo; the others pretended to think that I knew facts of which I was absolutely ignorant so as not to deprive themselves of the pleasure of talking about them to me.

"I don't blame you for not going with your husband to see those acrobats; they are so boring."

"Did he go to see acrobats?" I would ask, curiosity being stronger than pride.

"Didn't you know? He went to the Alhambra last night. Didn't he tell you about it? He was with Solange Villier. I thought you knew."

Men, on the other hand, pretended to pity me in order to offer me consolation.

It frequently happened that when we received an invitation to dinner, or when I proposed something, Philippe would answer, "Certainly, why not? But don't answer until to-morrow, and I'll tell you."

The only way I could account for this need of delay was that Philippe might telephone Solange next morn-

ing to ask her if she were going out that evening or if she wanted him to go out with her.

It seemed to me also that Philippe's tastes and personality began to bear, slightly but visibly, the imprint of this woman. Solange loved the country and flowers. She knew how to care for plants and animals. She had built a bungalow in Fontainebleau at the edge of the forest, and she spent week-ends there. Philippe often told me he was tired of Paris and would love to have a bit of land in the suburbs.

"But you have Gandumas, Philippe, and you go there as rarely as you dare."

"That's not the same thing at all; it takes seven hours to get there. I should like a house where I could go for a couple of days, even for one day. Chantilly would do, or Compiègne or Saint-Germain."

"Or Fontainebleau, Philippe?"

"Fontainebleau, if you wish," he said, smiling despite himself.

This smile thrilled me; it restored me in a measure to his confidence. It seemed to say, "Yes, I know that you know, and I trust you."

I felt, though, that it would be a mistake to insist and also that he would not say anything more definite; but I was convinced that there was some link between this sudden love for nature and the source of my anxiety, and that Philippe's life was now quite dependent upon Solange.

Philippe's influence upon Solange's tastes was no less striking, though obvious probably to no one but myself. I was not very observant, but there was nothing that concerned these two people that escaped me. At Hélène's on Saturdays Solange often talked of the books she had read. And she read the books that Philippe loved, that he had made me read, that, not infrequently, were those François had made Odile read who, in turn, had given Philippe his taste for them. I knew that François' liking was for the cynical and powerful, Cardinal de Retz and Machiavelli. Philippe's own taste was for *Lucien Leuwen*, *Smoke* of Turgenev, and the early books of Proust. The day I heard Solange discuss Machiavelli I could not repress a sad smile. As a woman, I knew that Machiavelli meant as little to her as ultra-violet rays or the Limousin enamels, but I knew also that she was capable of taking a keen interest in both and of discussing them intelligently to lure a man, if she thought she could do it that way.

When I first knew Solange, I remarked her tendency to wear bright colors. They were becoming to her, I must admit. For the last few months, she had been wearing white at night, continuously. White was a preference of Philippe's that he had inherited from Odile. How often he had spoken to me of Odile's brilliant whiteness! It was weird and sad to feel that Philippe kept poor little Odile alive in other women, in Solange, in me, and that each of us was trying to re-

create her vanished grace, Solange unconsciously perhaps.

It was weird and sad, but particularly sad for me, not only because I was painfully jealous but because it hurt me to find Philippe so unfaithful to Odile's memory. When I first met him, this fidelity struck me as one of the most beautiful traits of his character. Later, after he had given me the written story of his life with Odile, and after I had learned the truth about her flight, I admired still more Philippe's constant reverence for his only love. I admired and understood all the better, having created a lovable picture of Odile for myself. Her beauty, her frailty, her simplicity, her poetical and keen intelligence. . . . Yes, I too, after having been jealous of Odile, had come to love her. She alone, as he had described her to me, seemed worthy of the Philippe of my heart, the Philippe I alone saw perhaps. I was satisfied to be sacrificed to so beautiful a religion; I knew I was defeated, I wanted to be defeated. I bent the knee to Odile with cheerful humility, and in doing so I found a secret joy—perhaps a secret vanity.

For, despite appearances, this sentiment was not entirely pure. If I accepted Philippe's constancy to Odile, if I wished even that his love for her should endure, if I tried to forget Odile's faults and weaknesses, it was because I felt that the dead woman might protect me against living ones. In writing this, I show myself more morbid and calculating than I really am.

I was not thinking of myself, but of my love for Philippe. I loved him so much that I wanted him to be greater, more perfect than any one else. His attachment for an almost supernatural being (since death had removed all human imperfections) made him great in my eyes. But how could I help suffering when I saw him the slave of Solange Villier, whom I heard criticized and judged daily, who was made of the same material as I, of whom other women spoke disparagingly in my presence, whom I considered beautiful, even intelligent, but neither divine nor superhuman.

14.

Philippe had said to me, several times, "Solange has tried hard to become more intimate with you, but you rebuff her. She feels you are hostile, queer. . . ." It is true that she had often telephoned me since we returned from Switzerland and I had persistently refused to go out with her. It seemed to me more dignified not to see much of her. However, determined to show Philippe my goodwill, and to please him, I promised to go to see her once.

She received me in a boudoir which seemed to me to be in Philippe's taste, very bare, sparsely furnished. I was ill at ease. Solange, cheerful, self-assured, was lying on a sofa. Immediately, she became confidential. I noticed that she called me "Isabelle," while I hesitated between "Madame" and "My dear."

"How strange," I thought, while listening to her, "I know that Philippe loathes familiarity, lack of modesty, and the very thing that shocks me in this woman is the fact that she has no reserve; she says anything. . . . Why should he be so attracted to her? There is something lovely in her eyes—she looks happy . . . I wonder if she is."

A picture of Villier, of his somewhat bald head, the tone of his tired voice, entered my mind. I asked for news of him. He was away, as usual.

"I don't see much of Jacques, you know . . . though he is my very best friend. He is so straightforward, so frank . . . only it is hard to keep up the fiction of a passionate love—after thirteen years of married life; it would be hypocrisy, and I haven't any."

"It was a love match, though, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I adored Jacques. We had beautiful times together. But passion seldom lasts long . . . and the war did much to separate us. After four years, we had grown so accustomed to living apart . . ."

"How sad it is. And did you do nothing to recreate your happiness?"

"You know, once love is gone . . . or rather when the physical side of it has died (because I still have a lot of affection for Jacques) it is difficult to remain, outwardly, a very united couple . . . Jacques has a mistress; I know it and I approve of it. . . . You can't understand that yet, but a time comes when one feels the need of independence."

"Why so? It seems to me that marriage and independence are two entirely contradictory terms."

"Every one says that, in the beginning. But marriage, as you see it, has a disciplinary side. Is that shocking to you?"

"A bit perhaps . . . I mean . . ."

"I am very frank, Isabelle, I hate pose. If I pretend to love Jacques . . . or to hate him . . . I shall win your sympathy, but I shan't be myself. . . . Do you understand?"

She spoke without looking at me, for she was making little pencil sketches on the cover of a book while she talked. With her eyes lowered this way, her face looked hard and as though seared by a secret pain. "She is not happy at heart," I thought.

"No, I do not understand quite. . . . It must be so disappointing and unsatisfactory to live a chaotic and unstable life. . . . And then, too, you have a son."

"Yes, but you will see yourself when you have children. What community of ideas can there be between a woman and a twelve-year-old schoolboy? When I go to see him, I have a definite impression that I bore him."

"You think, then, that maternal love is a pose also?"

"No, it all depends upon circumstances. How aggressive you are, Isabelle!"

"Well, what I can't understand in you is that while you say, 'I am very frank and tolerate no hypocrisy,' you've never had the courage of your convictions.

Your husband has his own liberty and grants you yours. . . . Why don't you get divorced? It seems to me it would be more decent, more logical."

"What a queer idea! I don't want to marry again. Neither does Jacques. Why should we get divorced? We have many interests in common. My dowry bought our Marrakech land, but its development is Jacques' achievement. . . . And then, I have a great deal of fun when I see Jacques. It's all much more complex than it seems, Isabelle dear."

She then spoke of her Arab horses, of her pearls and of her green-houses at Fontainebleau.

"How funny!" I thought, "she professes to despise luxury, her real life is elsewhere, yet she can't help talking of it . . . and perhaps what is attractive to Philippe is the childish pleasure with which she enjoys things . . . but just the same it is amusing to contrast the tone of her lyrical monologues in the presence of a man, and the inventory of her worldly goods for the benefit of a woman."

When I left, she laughed and said,

"I suppose I have shocked you horribly, because you are a bride, and in love. . . . It's all very lovely. But don't take it tragically. Philippe is fond of you, you know; he always speaks of you most kindly."

It seemed to me unbearable that Solange should reassure me on the state of my matrimonial venture and Philippe's devotion. She said, "Come again soon, won't you?" But I never returned.

15.

A few weeks later, I fell ill. I coughed; I had chills. Philippe spent the evening by my bedside. The semi-darkness and the fever, too, perhaps gave me courage. I told him of the changes I had observed in him.

"You can't see yourself, Philippe, but I can hardly get over it . . . it's incredible . . . even the things you say . . . the other night, it struck me when you were arguing with Maurice de Thianges; there was something strangely harsh in your judgments."

"It's amazing what attention you give to everything I say, poor little one; much more than I do, I assure you. What did I say that was so harsh, the other night?"

"I have always loved your ideas about loyalty, the sanctity of an oath, respect for contracts, but that time, you remember, it was Maurice who maintained this attitude and you, on the contrary, you said that life is so short and that men are such miserable animals with so few occasions for happiness that they should seize every one that offers; and then, Philippe, (in order to say this I turned my head away and did not look at him) it seemed to me that you were saying it on account of Solange. You knew she was listening and those are her sentiments."

Philippe laughed and took my hand.

"How hot your hand is, and what an imagination

you have! Of course, I was not speaking for Solange. I meant just what I said. We fetter ourselves so often without really knowing what we are doing. Then we want to be loyal; we do not want to hurt those we love. For obscure reasons we deny ourselves certain pleasures, which we regret later. I maintain that this shows a sort of spurious virtue; that we never forgive those who have made us deny ourselves something we want and that, after all, it would be better, both for themselves and for us, if we had the courage to admit what we love and look life squarely in the face."

"What about you, Philippe? Have you any regret just now?"

"You always apply personally every generalization. No, I have no particular regret. I love you very much; I am perfectly happy with you, but I'd be still happier if you were not jealous."

"I'll try not to be."

The next day, the doctor found I had a very severe attack of tonsillitis. Philippe remained constantly by my side and saw that everything was done that should be done; he was quite devoted. Solange sent me flowers and books and came to see me as soon as I was up. I decided I had been unfair and hateful, but as soon as I was well and following my customary routine again, I was struck anew by their intimacy and it upset me as it had done before. Moreover, I was not the only one who worried about it. Monsieur Schreiber, the director of the Paris bureau, an Alsatian protestant,

who frequently came to the house for lunch, and with whom I had formed a real friendship, finding him both straightforward and staunch, said to me timidly one day when I had gone to see Philippe at his office and had not found him in,

"Madame Marcenat, you will excuse me if I ask you a question. Do you know what's come over Monsieur Philippe? He is not the same man."

"In what way do you mean?"

"Nothing seems to matter to him now; he doesn't come back to the office after lunch, as a rule; he does not keep appointments with his best customers; he has not been to Gandumas for three months. I do my best, but I am not the 'boss' . . . I can't fill his place."

So that was it. When Philippe said to me he was engrossed in business, he lied, he who had been so scrupulous, so loyal. But did he not lie in order to reassure me? And moreover, had I made it easy for him to be frank? Sometimes I wanted him to be happy and I promised myself that I would not upset him, but oftener I tormented him with questions and reproaches. I was bitter, insistent, hateful. He was always patient with me in his answers. I said to myself that under similar circumstances he had been more forebearing with Odile than I was with him, but I excused myself promptly with the thought that my predicament was far worse than his. For a man does not stake his whole life on love; he has his work, his friends, his ambitions. A woman constituted as I am

exists only for her love. There is no substitute for it. I disliked women, and men were indifferent to me. After long waiting, I believed I had won the only hand I cared to play: a unique and absolute love. I had lost it. I could see no end or remedy for this frightful tragedy.

Thus was spent the second year of my married life.

## 16.

Two things happened, however, to quell my anxiety. Philippe for a long time had planned a trip to the United States. He wished to study some aspects of the paper industry and to observe living conditions of the American workingmen. I was very keen to accompany him. He discussed the matter from time to time and asked me to look up steamers and rates. Then, after much deliberation, he gave it up. I was now sure he would never go and was quite resigned to it; indeed, by that time I had become resigned to anything. I used to think I should have to adopt Philippe's ideas of chivalrous love. "I love and I shall love him whatever happens, but I shall never be perfectly happy."

In January, Philippe said to me one evening, "This time my mind is made up. We are going to the United States in the spring."

"Am I going, too, Philippe?"

"Of course you are going. I promised you we

would, and that's one of my chief reasons for wanting to go. We'll stay six weeks. I can do all I have to do in ten days so we shall be free to travel about the rest of the time."

"How good you are, Philippe; I am delighted."

I really thought he was very good. Self-distrust makes one profoundly and naïvely humble. In all sincerity, I did not believe Philippe could find much pleasure in travelling with me. Above all, I was particularly grateful to him that he should deprive himself for two months of any chance of seeing Solange Villier. Had he loved her as I often feared he did, he who was so solicitous for the welfare of those he loved, he could not have left her like that. So, after all, matters were not so serious as I had imagined. I remember how joyous and carefree I was all that month—not once did I annoy Philippe by complaints or questions.

In February, I realized I was going to have a baby. That pleased me immensely. I had passionately wished to have a child, a boy particularly; it seemed to me he would be another Philippe, but this Philippe would belong to me completely for fifteen years at least. Philippe's joy, at the news, was an added happiness. But the first few months of pregnancy were so trying that it was evident I could not stand a sea voyage. Philippe proposed to abandon the trip. I knew he had written many letters, arranged for visits to factories and made various engagements, so I in-

sisted he should not change his plans. Retrospectively, I see several reasons why I imposed this painful separation upon myself. In the first place, I knew I had lost my looks; my face looked tired; I was afraid he would not like me. Then, much as I loved having Philippe with me, I may perhaps have loved still more the idea of putting distance between him and Solange. And finally, I had often heard Philippe say that woman's great power lies in absence; that, away from them, one forgets their faults, their mannerisms; one discovers that they add a precious, indispensable element to life, an element that we fail to notice because of its very closeness. "It is just like salt," he used to say, "we are not conscious of eating it, but remove it from our diet and undoubtedly we should die."

If only Philippe, miles away from me, were to discover that I was the salt of his life!

He sailed early in April, and his parting instructions were that I should see friends, divert myself. A few days after his departure, feeling better, I tried to go out a little. I had received no letter from him; I knew it would be at least a fortnight now before I did, and I felt I needed to shake off the melancholy that was taking possession of me. I telephoned some friends and I thought it would be proper and prudent to call Solange. I had difficulty in getting an answer. Finally a servant answered and told me that she had left Paris for two months. It gave me a horrible shock. I be-

lieved, insanely of course, because it was so impossible, that she had gone with Philippe. I asked for her address; I was told she was at her Marrakech home. That was, of course, the answer; she was making her customary visit to Morocco. And yet, after I had rung off I felt so weak that I had to lie down, and for a long time I meditated deeply and sadly. That was why Philippe had accepted the idea of this absence so cheerfully. I was hurt the more because he had told me nothing about it. He allowed me to believe that his offer was a generous sacrifice. To-day, with the help of time, I feel much more indulgent. Powerless to tear himself away from her, yet kindly disposed toward me, Philippe had done his best to give me all he could snatch from a love that could no longer be denied.

The first letters I received from him served to remove this impression. They were affectionate and picturesque; he seemed to be sorry that I was not with him and to wish he could share with me a mode of life which he enjoyed. "This country is made for you, Isabelle, it's a country of comfort and perfection, of order and efficiency. New York might be a gigantic house, managed by an omnipotent and efficient Isabelle." In another, "How I miss you, my dearest! It would be such fun to find you, at night, in this hotel bedroom, peopled only by a tiresomely active telephone. We could have long talks together, such as I love; we would review the people and things that filled the day, and your clear little mind would help me with

valuable suggestions. Then you would say to me, probably hesitatingly and with apparent indifference, 'Do you really think this Mrs. Lawrence Cooper, with whom you spent the whole evening yesterday, is pretty?' I would kiss you and we would look at each other, laughing. Wouldn't we, dear?" When I read this, I smiled, indeed, and I was grateful to him for knowing me well, and for accepting me as I was.

17.

Everything in life is unexpected, and perhaps that is the way it should be, to the end. This separation, which I had feared so keenly, remains now in my memory as a period of comparative happiness. I was much alone, but I read and worked. I was tired most of the time, and slept a part of each day. Illness is a form of moral happiness, for it imposes strict limitations upon our desires and our cares. Philippe was away, but I knew that he was well and happy. His letters were charming. There was neither quarrel nor shadow between us. Solange was in the depths of Morocco, separated by seven or eight days of ocean from my husband. The whole world seemed more beautiful to me, and life was easier and sweeter than I had known it for a long time. I understood then a sentence Philippe had once told me and which I had thought monstrous: "Love stands absence or death better than suspicion or deceit."

Philippe had made me promise not to neglect our friends. I dined once at the Thianges', twice at Aunt Cora's. She was getting quite old. Death had broken up her collection of generals, admirals and ambassadors. Many of them had not been replaced. She herself was likely to fall asleep in the midst of a friendly and ironic circle. Some one had predicted she would die during a dinner. I remained grateful to her, for it was at her house that I had met Philippe, and I was faithful in my visits to her. It even happened that once or twice I lunched alone with her, contrary to all the traditions of the house. One evening I opened my heart to her, and as she encouraged me I finally told her my whole story—first my childhood, then my marriage, then Solange's intrusion into my happiness and my jealousy. She listened to me, smiling.

"Let me tell you, little one, that if you never have anything more serious to be sad about, you'll live a very happy woman. What are you complaining of? That your husband is unfaithful to you? Men are never faithful. . . ."

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Cora, but my father-in-law, for instance . . ."

"Your father-in-law was a hermit, I'll admit. I knew him better than you did. But where's his merit? He spent his whole youth in a provincial town, in an incredible atmosphere. . . . He had no temptations. Now take my dear husband. Do you think he has

never deceived me? Do you know that for twenty years of my life, I was aware of the fact that my best friend, Jeanne de Casa-Ricci, was his mistress . . . I shan't attempt to tell you that I liked the idea, at first, but it came out all right. . . . I remember the day we celebrated our golden anniversary . . . every one who is anybody in Paris was invited . . . poor old Adrian, whose mind was not so lucid then, made a little speech in which he confused me with Jeanne Casa, and with the admiral! Every one laughed, of course, but in reality it was all very sweet. We were old, and we had spent our lives as well as we knew how; we had not spoiled anything beyond recovery . . . and furthermore, the dinner was so excellent that people did not give much thought to anything else. . . ."

"That's all very well, Aunt Cora. But I suppose it depends upon one's make-up, too. As far as I am concerned, love is everything in my life; society does not interest me. So . . ."

"But, my dear, who is advising you to give it up? It goes without saying that I am quite fond of my nephew, and I'd be the last person in the world to advise you to take a lover . . . that's certain . . . but after all, if it pleases Monsieur Philippe to run elsewhere when he has a young, pretty wife of his own, surely I'd be the last one to blame you if you too tried to fill your life. Indeed, no farther than in this very house, I know men who are quite attracted by you, and . . ."

"But, Aunt Cora, dear, I believe in marriage . . ."

"Of course . . . so do I . . . I've proved it, but marriage is one thing and love is another. . . . One must have a solid piece of canvas, but who ever forbade us to embroider pretty motives on it? The only thing is the way it is done. What I object to in young women to-day is that they have no breeding."

The old lady talked on for a long time in that vein; she amused me and we liked one another, but we were not of the same cloth, and could not achieve much understanding.

I was also invited by the Sommervieus, who had business dealings with Philippe. I thought it my duty to accept, because of their connection with Philippe. When I reached their house, I was sorry I had come, for I soon realized that I knew no one there. The house was beautiful, furnished in a style perhaps too modern to please me, but in good taste. Philippe would have liked the pictures; there were several Marquets, a Sisley and a Lebourg. Madame Sommervieu introduced many people to me. Most of the men belonged to the class of successful engineers, robust of body and alert of face. I paid no attention to the names, knowing I would forget them immediately. "This is Madame Godet," said my hostess. I looked at the lady to whom I was being presented; she was a pretty blonde, somewhat faded. Her husband, wearing the Legion of Honor, looked domineering. I knew nothing of them, and yet it seemed to me I

had heard the name Godet before. I asked my hostess,

"Who is this Monsieur Godet?"

"Godet? He is the great steel magnate. One of the directors of the Aciéries de l'Ouest, and quite important in coal mines, too."

Possibly Philippe had mentioned him to me, or was it Villier?

Godet sat beside me at dinner. He looked at my place-card with interest, because he had not heard my name, and said immediately,

"Are you by chance Philippe Marcenat's wife?"

"Yes, I am."

"I have known your husband for a long time. I began my career in his plant, rather his father's plant, in Limousin. Sad beginnings they were. I was supposed to take charge of a paper factory, and I had absolutely no interest in it. I was quite the under-dog in the place. Your father-in-law was hard to work for, he was so stern. I haven't retained a very happy memory of Gandumas. I'm sorry, I shouldn't tell you all this. I hope I haven't offended you."

As he spoke, suddenly I understood . . . Misa, he was Misa's husband. . . . All that Philippe had written me about them came back to me as clearly as though I had had the very words under my eyes. So this pretty woman, with the soft and unhappy look in her eyes, at the other end of the table, smiling at her neighbor, was the woman whom Philippe had embraced one

evening, as they sat among cushions, in front of a dying fire. It seemed incredible. In my imagination this cruel and sensuous Misa had assumed the personality of a Lucrezia Borgia, of a Hermione. Had Philippe described her so poorly? I wondered. But I had to talk with her husband.

"Yes, indeed, Philippe has often mentioned your name to me," and I added somewhat reluctantly, "Madame Godet was a great friend of my husband's first wife, wasn't she?"

He turned his eyes away from me and looked embarrassed, also. I wondered what he knew.

"Yes, they were childhood friends. Then they had a quarrel; Odile did not behave particularly well toward Misa, I mean Marie-Thérèse, but I call my wife Misa."

"Of course you do."

I realized how strange that must sound, and changed the topic. We talked of the Franco-German situation, about steel, ore and coke. He showed me the influence these important industrial questions had upon foreign affairs. His ideas were broad and interesting. I asked him if he knew Jacques Villier.

"The Villier in Morocco? Yes, he is a director in one of my companies."

"Do you consider him clever?"

"I scarcely know him . . . he has been successful. . . ."

After dinner, I managed to approach his wife. I

knew that Philippe would have forbidden me to do so, and I had made some effort to prevent myself, but passionate curiosity got the better of me. She looked astonished. I said to her,

"Your husband reminded me at dinner that you had known mine quite well, years ago."

"Yes," she answered coldly, "Julian and I spent several months at Gandumas."

She looked at me queerly, as though she were hurt and yet desirous of asking a question. She seemed to wonder if I knew the truth, if my apparent cordiality was a pretense. The strange thing is that I found her attractive. I was touched by her grace and by her grave, sad look. I thought, "She looks like a woman who has suffered. Who knows? Perhaps she wanted Philippe's happiness? Perhaps she had tried, because she loved him, to warn him against a woman who could only make him miserable? Is that a crime?"

I sat beside her and tried to win her confidence. It took me an hour to make her speak of Odile. She could not do so without a certain disquietude which showed me how keen were the emotions that the memory still evoked in her.

"It's awfully hard for me to speak of Odile," she said. "I loved her deeply and more than that I had great admiration for her. Then she hurt me—then she died. I don't want to defame her memory—in your eyes particularly."

She looked at me again, with the same strange look, heavy with unasked questions.

"Please don't believe I feel any hostility to her memory. I have heard so much about her that in a way I have come to feel that she was part of me. She must have been beautiful."

"Yes," she said sadly. "She was remarkably beautiful. There was something in her eyes, however, which I never liked much . . . a sort of, no, I don't mean deceit . . . that would be too big a word; it was more like a sort of duplicity. Odile was the kind of human being who needed to dominate. She always had to impose *her* will, *her* truth. Her beauty had given her self-confidence, and she believed sincerely that if she said a thing it became true. It was all right with your husband, for he adored her, but not with me; she could not forgive me when I failed to respond."

I listened to her and what she said hurt me. I could now see the Odile that Renée and my mother-in-law had known, an Odile who was almost the Solange that Hélène de Thianges depicted, but not Philippe's Odile whom I loved.

"How strange. You are giving me the impression of a strong, willful person. When Philippe speaks of her, he gives me the impression of a frail woman, usually lying down, a little childish and very good at heart."

"That's true also, but I believe that was the surface

Odile. Her real nature was bold, audacious. I don't know just how to put it . . . she had the audacity of a soldier, of a partisan. For instance, when she decided to hide . . . but I can't tell that to you . . ."

"What you call boldness Philippe calls courage; it was one of her great qualities, he says."

"You may call it that, of course; it is true in some ways; but she lacked the courage to impose limits upon herself, though she had the courage to do anything she wanted. It's a great thing just the same, but less difficult."

"Have you any children?"

"Yes, three; two boys and a girl," she answered, looking at the floor.

We spent the evening together and before we left we had laid the foundations of a firm friendship. For the first time, I was in complete disagreement with Philippe's judgment. No, this woman was not bad. She had been in love and jealous. Who was I to blame her for that? As we parted, I gave way to an impulse which I regretted immediately. I said to her,

"Good night. It has been delightful to meet you. I am quite alone just now, and perhaps we could do something together."

The moment I left the drawing-room I said to myself it was a mistake; Philippe would not have approved; he would hear I had formed a friendship with Misa; he would be angry and he would be right to be angry.

Evidently, she had found some pleasure in our talk, too, or perhaps she was curious to know more of me and my life; she telephoned me two days later and we planned a walk in the Bois. What I wanted was to make her speak of Odile, to learn from her Odile's tastes, her habits and her customs—and thus perhaps make myself more attractive to Philippe, with whom I did not dare discuss the past. I asked Misa many questions, "How did she dress?" "Who was her milliner?" "I have been told that she had such a knack for arranging flowers. What is there so individual about the way flowers are arranged? Tell me. . . . But isn't it strange? You tell me, and everybody tells me of her great charm, and yet when you come to particulars, many of her qualities seem to have been hard, almost disagreeable. What, then, is the explanation of this charm?"

But Misa could not give me any clue to its composition, and I could see that she had often asked herself the same question and had never found an answer. All that I gathered from what she told me about Odile was that she had a keen appreciation of nature, as Solange had, and that she had a spontaneity which I lacked. "I am too methodical," I thought. "I distrust my first impulses too much. I believe that Odile's childish side was as attractive to Philippe as her moral qualities, if not more so."

Later, we spoke of Philippe more intimately. I told her how deeply in love with him I was.

"Yes, but are you happy with him?"

"Very. Why?"

"Nothing in particular . . . I was just asking. And I can well see how you would love him; there is something extremely winning about him. But at the same time he shows such weakness when he deals with women of Odile's type, and that I suppose must make him horribly difficult as a husband."

"Why do you say 'women'? Have you known others in his life?"

"No, but I sense it. Don't you see, he is a man who must be repelled by any display of passion or devotion. Of course, I don't know, really I don't know him very well, but I can imagine. When I knew him, I saw a futile and frivolous side that lowered him in my estimation. But let me tell you again that nothing I say is of much value. I never knew him well, really."

Suddenly I felt very embarrassed; she seemed to take such pleasure in saying those things. Was Philippe right after all? Was she wicked? I spent a horrible evening when I got home. There was a sweet letter from Philippe in my room. I begged him in my mind to forgive me for ever having suspected him. Of course he was weak, but I loved this weakness in him, and in Misa's disturbing words, I wished to read only the disappointment of her own love. She asked me several times to go out with her, even to dinner. But each time I declined.

18.

Philippe's absence was coming to an end. I was tremendously happy at the thought of it. My health was much improved; indeed, I seemed to be in better health than I was before pregnancy. The joy of his homecoming and the sense of new life shaping within me gave me calm and equanimity. I was doing all I could so that Philippe might be pleasantly astonished on his return. I was sure he had seen in the United States many beautiful women and households perfectly managed. Despite my condition, indeed because of it, I took great pains with my clothes. I made some changes in the furnishing of the apartment because Misa had given me several ideas of what Odile would have liked. On the day of his arrival, I had white flowers all over. That day I had conquered what Philippe jokingly called my "sordid thrift."

When Philippe got off the steamer train at Gare Saint-Lazare, I found him younger looking and cheerful, tanned by six days at sea. He was full of recollections and anecdotes. The first days were delightful. I had made sure that Solange was still in Morocco. And Philippe granted himself a week's holiday which he devoted entirely to me.

It was during this week that something happened which illuminated for me my husband's real nature. One morning at about ten, I went out for a fitting. Philippe stayed in bed. When I returned he told me

that, after I had gone, the telephone bell rang and when he answered it, a masculine voice with which he was not familiar said,

"Madame Marcenat?"

"No, this is Monsieur Marcenat. Who is it?"

A sharp click. Whoever it was had rung off.

That astonished him; he called up the manager to locate the call; it took some time but finally he was told, "Stock Exchange, a public booth," which may have been a mistake and in any case explained nothing.

When I came back, he said,

"Who could possibly telephone you from the Stock Exchange?"

"From the Stock Exchange!"

"Yes. Some one called you from there; I answered and said I was Monsieur Marcenat, and the person immediately hung up."

"How strange! Are you sure of it?"

"That question is unworthy of you, Isabelle. Of course I am sure. And there was no hesitation about the voice."

"Man or woman?"

"Man, of course."

"Why 'of course'?"

He had never before spoken to me in that tone; despite myself I was embarrassed. Although he had said it was a man's voice, I was convinced it was Misa who had telephoned (she did so frequently) and I did not dare mention her name. I was angry with Philippe

who seemed ready to suspect a wife who adored him, and yet I was somewhat flattered. He could be jealous of me, then? There seemed to mature within me a woman of whose existence I had not been aware before, an Isabelle somewhat ironic, a little coquettish, a little patronizing. Dear old Philippe! Had you but known how I lived for you and you alone, you might have felt safe, too safe perhaps. After dinner, he said to me, with a casualness which recalled certain words of my own,

"What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Nothing in particular, some shopping; then at five, I am going to Madame Brémont for tea."

"Would you mind if I went with you, now that I am on my holiday?"

"On the contrary, I shall be delighted. You have not accustomed me to such attention lately. I shall meet you there at six."

"At six? Why, you just said five."

"Well, like all those parties, the invitation says five, but no one gets there before six."

"Couldn't I go shopping with you?"

"Of course, you may. Only I thought you wanted to stop at your office to look at the mail."

"No hurry about it. I'll do it to-morrow."

"You are a perfect husband when you come back from a journey, Philippe."

He went out with me and we spent the whole after-

noon in a constrained atmosphere, quite new to us. Philippe's notebook says something about that day; it revealed feelings to me which, at that time, I did not believe were so intense.

*It seems to me that while I was away she has developed a sort of self-confidence, of self-assurance which she did not have. That is what it is, self-assurance. Why? It is queer. She left the carriage to buy some flowers and, as she did so, gave me a long, affectionate look which seemed unusual to me. At the Brémonts' she had a long talk with Dr. Gaulin, and I caught myself trying to hear the tone in which they spoke. He was telling of some experiments on mice.*

*"Take a mouse who has not bred and put beside it a baby mouse; she won't pay the slightest attention to it, she will let it starve if you don't intervene. But give this same mouse an injection of ovarian extract and in two days she will be an admirable mother."*

*"How interesting," said Isabelle. "How I should like to see that!"*

*"Come to my laboratory any day. I'll show you."*

*For a moment it seemed to me that Gaulin's voice was the one I had heard on the telephone.*

Never was the absurdity of all jealousy so revealed to me as from this note, because never were suspicions so founded in imagination. This Gaulin was an attractive, intelligent physician very much talked about in society

that year, whom I found interesting. But the idea that one could look upon him as a man had never entered my mind. From the day I married Philippe, I was incapable of even "seeing" another man; they all seemed to me clumsy things, whose purpose either was to serve Philippe or to injure him. I could not imagine myself loving any one else. And yet, on a piece of paper pinned to the preceding note Philippe had written,

*Accustomed as I am to blend love with the tortures of suspicion, at times I believe I am again in love. This same Isabelle who, three months ago, I thought too attentive, always around me, now I can't keep her around me as much as I wish. Was I ever really bored by her? At the present time, I am in appearance less happy but I am never bored for a moment. Isabelle is very much astonished by this attitude, but she is so modest that the real meaning of this change remains a puzzle to her. This morning she said to me,*

*"If you don't mind, I'll go to the Pasteur Institute this afternoon to see some of Gaulin's experiments."*

*"You certainly shall not go," I said to her.*

*She looked at me, dumbfounded by my outburst.*

*"Why not, Philippe? You heard what he said the other day; it seems so interesting."*

*"Gaulin has a way of treating women which displeases me very much."*

*"Gaulin? What a queer idea! I have seen him a lot this winter, here and there, and I have not noticed*

*anything offensive about his manner, and you scarcely know him; you saw him about ten minutes at the Brémonts'."*

*"You are quite right and it was during those ten minutes that . . ."*

*Then, for the first time since I knew her, Isabelle smiled as Odile might have smiled.*

*"Would you be jealous, by chance? Ah, that's too funny; you can't imagine how it amuses me."*

I remember that scene well. It did amuse me a little and as I just wrote it made me very happy. Suddenly, I felt that I had hold of something concrete in this mind of Philippe which had been closed to me so long! Some imponderable thing that I had attempted vainly to seize and to keep. The temptation was great, and if I have earned some indulgence in my life I feel I earned it at that time, for I knew that by playing a certain mysterious and coquettish game I could bind my husband to me with a new strength. I made two or three harmless experiments. Yes, that was Philippe's nature. Suspicion tortured and fascinated him. But I knew also that it was a continuous pain for him, an obsession. I knew it because I had read the story of his past life, and I confirmed my knowledge every day. Worried by my words or actions, he would fall into sad meditation, sleep badly, and lose interest in his work. How could he give way to such folly? I was going to have my baby in four months, and all my

thoughts were given to him and to it. He would not—or could not see it.

I decided not to play the game I might so easily have won. That is the only merit I claim. It is the only big sacrifice I made, but I made it and I should like to hope that, because of it, you forgave me, Philippe, forgave me for my tyrannical, mad jealousy, and for the narrowness of my views which so often irritated you. I too could have bound you, deprived you of your strength, of your freedom, of your happiness; I too could have inspired in you this painful disquiet that you sought, that you wanted. I did not want to do it. I wanted to love you without stratagem, to fight my battle with breast unprotected. I gave myself to you defenseless, while you yourself were offering me weapons. I believe I did right. It seems to me that love must be something greater than a merciless duel between lovers. It should be possible to admit one's love, and be loved despite the admission. That was your great weakness, my darling. You had to be saved from boredom by the cruelty of the woman you loved. It was not thus that I understood love. I felt myself capable of complete devotion, of slavery even. Nothing existed in the world for me save you. Had some calamity destroyed all the men of our acquaintance and had you been spared, it would not have been calamity for me. You were my whole world. Perhaps it was unwise to let you see it. What did it matter? With you, my love, I had no desire to follow a wise

course. I was incapable of pretending, of being prudent. I loved you.

In a few days, thanks to the docility of my actions, and to the simplicity of my life, I brought quiet to Philippe's mind. I gave up seeing Gaulin, reluctantly, because he was an attractive person. I stayed home most of the time.

The last months of my pregnancy were distressing. I was conscious of my deformity and did not care to go out with Philippe, fearing he might feel embarrassed. In the last few weeks, he was most devoted to me, stayed home every day and read aloud to me. Never had our married life conformed more closely to the ideal I had formed of it than it did then. We reread some famous novels together. I had read Balzac and Tolstoy in my youth, but their meaning had escaped me. Now, everything seemed full of significance. I was Dolly in *Anna Karenina;* Anna herself was partly Odile, partly Solange. When Philippe read, I could see that he was making the same comparisons. Now and then, a sentence so obviously reflected ourselves or myself, that Philippe raised his eyes from the book and looked at me with a smile he could not repress. I smiled also.

I would have been very happy had Philippe not seemed sad to me. He did not complain, he was well, but frequently, he would sigh, sit in an armchair near my bed, stretch his long arms with a sort of lassitude and pass his hand over his eyes.

"Tired, dear?"

"Just a litttle. I feel I need a change of air. That office, all day long. . . ."

"Yes, and then you stay with me every evening. Why don't you go out, dear . . . see people . . . why don't you ever go to the theater or to a concert?"

"You know how I hate going out alone."

"Isn't Solange coming back soon? She was away for two months, they said. Haven't you heard from her?"

"Yes, she wrote me. She said she would stay longer, so as not to leave her husband alone."

"How is that? She leaves him alone every year—why this sudden solicitude? It looks funny, doesn't it?"

"How should I know?" he answered, irritated. "That's what she wrote me. That's all I know."

19.

Solange returned a few weeks before my confinement. The sudden change in Philippe was a fearful blow to me. One evening he came in, alert and cheerful. He had brought me flowers and fat pink shrimps which I particularly liked. He walked around my bedroom, excitedly, his hands in his pockets, and told me funny things about his office and the publishers he had met. "What's happened," I wondered, "where does all this elation come from?"

He had dinner beside my bed and casually, without looking at him, I asked,

"Still no news of Solange?"

"What?" he answered rather too casually, "didn't I tell you she telephoned me this morning? She came back last night."

"I'm so glad for your sake, Philippe. . . . You'll have some one to go out with you when I am unable to go."

"Don't be silly, Isabelle. I'm not going to leave your bedside."

"I want you to leave it; and then I shan't be alone; mother will be in Paris soon."

"That's right," he said, delighted, "she can't be so far away now; where was her last telegram from?"

"It was a radio from the ship, but from what the steamship company tells me, she should be at Suez to-morrow."

"I am so glad for you; it's so decent of her to have taken this long journey to see you through all right."

"Yes, Philippe, my family is like yours—births and deaths are picnics for them. I recall that the funerals of some of our provincial cousins were among my father's most cheerful recollections."

"I know. When Grandfather Marcenat was very old and his doctor forbade him to go to funerals, he complained bitterly, 'They won't let me go to the funeral of poor Ludovic,' he said, 'and I have so few amusements now!' "

"You seem to me to be in a good mood to-night, Philippe."

"I? Not particularly . . . but after all, the weather is lovely, you are getting on splendidly, this nine months' nightmare is coming to an end. So I am happy. That's quite natural, isn't it?"

In reality, it hurt my pride to see him so elated, for I knew the cause of this transformation. His appetite, which had given me concern for many months, was better that evening than it had been at any time since St. Moritz. After dinner, he was nervous and fidgety. He yawned.

"Shall we read a little? I love that Stendhal we began last night."

"*Lamiel?* Oh, yes . . . it's damn good. . . . Yes, let's read if you want to."

He looked bored.

"Look here, Philippe, do you know what you should do? Go and say how do you do to Solange. You have not seen her for five months; it would be polite of you to do it."

"Do you think so? But I hate to leave you alone, and then I have no idea whether she is at home or not, and if she is, she may not be seeing any one. The first evening home, she'll probably want to be with her family, or with Jacques' family."

"Telephone her, why don't you?"

I had hoped he would have to be coaxed a little,

were it only for the looks of the thing, but he surrendered at once.

"All right, I shall." And he went out.

He returned, all smiles, five minutes later and said,

"Since you don't mind, I'll go around to Solange. I won't stay there more than fifteen minutes."

"Stay as long as you like. I am delighted you are going, and it will do you good. But stop here to say good night when you come in, even though it is late."

"It won't be late; it's nine now, I'll be back at a quarter to ten."

It was midnight when I saw him again. And while I waited for him, I read a little and cried a lot.

20.

Mother arrived from China a few days before the baby was born. When I saw her I was astonished to find that I was at once closer to her and further from her than I had expected. She criticized the way we lived, the servants, the furniture, our friends, and her rebukes touched invisible and distant chords in me which gave forth, though faintly, the same note. However, this family background was thickly covered by Philippe's influence, and things which astonished or shocked her appeared quite natural to me. She had noticed that Philippe was not quite so attentive to me as he might have been, these last few weeks. I was hurt when she said, "I'll keep you company to-night, be-

cause I don't believe your husband will have the courage to stay at home," and I was angry with myself for realizing that my pride suffered more than my love. I was sorry mother had not come before Solange returned, for then Philippe never left me save to go to his office. I should have liked her to see that I, too, could be loved. Frequently, she would stand by my bed and look at me with a critical expression, which revived in me all the fear of my girlhood. Relentless, nearly hostile, she would put her fingers on the part in my hair and say, "You're getting gray." It was true.

When Philippe returned after midnight and the passersby in the street were few, I listened to the footsteps, that I might recognize his. I can still hear the disappointing sound that, growing louder, gives rise to the hope it will stop, then continues, diminishes and ceases. A man who is in sight of his own door will slacken his pace some feet away from it. It was by this slackening that I would recognize Philippe. Then the sound of a bell through the house, the slam of a distant door, and he was in the house. Every day I made up my mind to be cheerful and more tolerant, but nearly every day I greeted him with some complaint. I was myself hurt by the violence with which I repeated the same words.

"Oh, I can't stand it any more, I assure you, Isabelle," Philippe would say wearily. "Can't you realize how inconsistent you are? You beg me to go out; I do so, and when I come back, you overwhelm me with

reproaches. What do you want me to do? Shut myself up in this house? Say the word and I'll do it. . . . I promise you I shall. . . . I'll do anything rather than go through these daily quarrels . . . but please don't be so generous at nine in the evening, and so incredibly mean at midnight."

"You're right, Philippe. I am unbearable. I shan't do it again, I swear I shan't."

The next day, some evil genius would prompt the same useless words. It was particularly against Solange that I was bitter. "At such a time as this," I thought, "she should have the decency to leave my husband to me."

She came to see me. Conversation was difficult. She was wearing a beautiful sable coat and talked at great length of the merits of her furrier. After a little while, Philippe came in; she must have told him she was coming, for he was earlier than usual. The coat then became a useless aid to conversation; the Marrakech garden took its place.

"You can't imagine what it looks like, Isabelle. Every morning I walk barefooted on the warm stones, in the midst of orange trees. Roses and jasmine twine around each column. . . . One sees the pale blue houses shining through flowers and foliage, and above the roofs, the snow of the Atlas Mountains glitters like a diamond. . . . [Another diamond, like the one we had in St. Moritz, I thought.] And such nights! The moon, with cypresses pointing at it, like black fingers

. . . a guitar in a neighboring garden. . . . Oh, Marcenat . . . how I love it!"

With head thrown back, she seemed to be inhaling the perfume of the jasmine and of the rose.

When she left Philippe accompanied her to the door. After he returned, he stood leaning against the mantelpiece and said, somewhat embarrassed,

"Isabelle, do you know what we should do? . . . Sometime . . . we should go to Morocco together. . . . It is really gorgeous. . . . Look, I brought you a book on the natives, on their intimate life. It's by Robert Etienne. It's a sort of novel, and still at the same time, it's a poem. It's an amazing piece of work."

"Poor dear Philippe, if you knew how I pity you, for being obliged to have so much to do with women. . . . They are such actresses!"

"What makes you say that, Isabelle?"

"Because it is true, my dear. I know them well, and they are most uninteresting."

Finally, I felt the first warning pains. Labor was long and painful. Philippe's anxiety was a comfort to me. He was livid, much more frightened than I was. I saw that he wanted me to live. His concern gave me courage, and in the effort to calm him I controlled my own nerves completely and spoke to him of our little boy, because I was sure I was going to have a son.

"We'll call him Alain, Philippe. His eyebrows will be a little too high, just like yours, and when he is

worried about anything, he'll walk up and down, his hands in his pockets, and he will be worried most of the time, won't he, dear? The son of such parents . . . such heredity!"

Philippe tried to smile, but I could see he was ready to cry. When the pain got worse, I asked him to hold my hands.

"Do you remember, Philippe, when I put my hand in yours at 'Siegfried'? That was the beginning of it all."

Later I overheard Dr. Crés, in the next room, say to Philippe,

"Your wife has amazing courage. I've seldom seen anything quite like it."

"Yes, she is really remarkable. I hope nothing will happen."

"What could happen? Everything is going on splendidly."

Toward the end they gave me chloroform; I did not want it. When I opened my eyes I saw Philippe near me, tender and happy.

"We've got a little boy, darling," he said, kissing my hand.

I asked to see the baby and, when they showed it to me, I was quite disappointed.

Philippe's mother and mine were in the sitting room adjoining my bedroom. The door between the two rooms was open and, with eyes closed and half in slumber, I could hear their pessimistic forecast about the

education of the child. Although they were entirely different by nature and likely to disagree on nearly everything, there was one subject upon which they were fully in accord; that the younger generation had much to learn.

"It's going to be a nice mess," said Madame Marcenat, "with Philippe who will concern himself with everything save the education of his child, and Isabelle who will occupy herself only with Philippe. I wager the child will do exactly as he pleases."

"How could it be otherwise," said my mother, "this young generation has only one word in its mouth: happiness. Children must be happy, husbands must be happy, mistresses must be happy, servants must be happy and, in order to get this happiness, they break down barriers, and they won't hear the word punishment or penalty mentioned, and they forgive everything, not only before forgiveness is deserved, but before it is even asked. It's incredible. And what's the result? If only they were happier than we are, I could understand it, but the extraordinary thing is they are less happy, much less. . . . Take my own daughter for instance. . . . I wonder if she is asleep? Are you asleep, Isabelle?"

I did not answer.

"It's queer she should be so drowsy the third day, isn't it?" Mother said.

"Why did they give her chloroform? I told Philippe that if I had been in his place, I would not have al-

lowed it. One must let Nature do the work. I have had three children myself, so I know. . . . Unfortunately I lost two, but I had them naturally without having recourse to drugs. Those artificial things are bad, both for mother and child. I was very angry when I heard how apprehensive Isabelle had been. I believe you could search our entire family (and there are Marcenats in ten provinces) and not find one who would have taken chloroform in her place. . . ."

"Indeed?" Mother said politely; she had advised me to take it but, being a diplomat's wife, she was anxious to avoid any conflict that would imperil their common offensive against the younger generation.

"As I was saying, take my daughter, for instance. [This was said in an undertone.] At times she admits she is not very happy. It is not Philippe's fault. He is an excellent husband, not crazier about women than the average man. No, she is unhappy because she always analyzes herself, she is always discontented, always consulting the barometer of her *ménage*, 'their love,' as she calls it. . . . Have you ever given much thought, that way, to your *ménage?* I have not. I have tried to help my husband in his career; I had a large house to manage; we were extremely busy and everything went very well. It is the same way with the education of children. Isabelle says that she wants above everything else that Alain should have a pleasanter youth than she had, but I assure you her youth

was not unhappy. To be sure, I was rather strict with her, but I am far from being sorry for that. You see yourself what the result has been."

"Yes, of course, if you had not brought her up as you did," said Madame Marcenat, in a half whisper, "Isabelle would never have become the charming woman she is. She owes you a great debt of gratitude, and my son does too. . . ."

I was as still as a mouse. This conversation amused me. "After all, they may be right, who knows?" I thought.

When they began to discuss Alain's feeding, dissension arose at once. My mother-in-law thought I should nurse him myself and loathed the idea of an English nurse. My mother had said to me, "Isabelle, don't you attempt it; nervous as you are you'll have to give it up after three weeks, and meanwhile you'll have made your baby ill." Neither did Philippe want me to nurse the baby, but as I had attached symbolic importance to it, I persisted. The results were just as my mother had predicted. Since the arrival of the child, everything had disappointed me. I had indulged such great hopes that reality was powerless to satisfy them. I thought the baby would be a strong, new link between Philippe and me. He was not. The truth was that Philippe felt very little interest in his son. Once a day he went to the baby's room, practiced English on the nurse, and then became again the Philippe I had always known, kindly and distant . . . a vague mist of bore-

dom enveloping his affectionate and cheerless politeness. It seemed to me that it was something more than boredom. Philippe was sad. He went out less frequently. At first, I thought he stayed home because of consideration for me; he did not want to leave me alone while I was still weak, but several times when mother or some friend was announced, I would say to him,

"I know, dear, how this silly family talk bores you. Why don't you telephone Solange and take her to the theatre or the cinema?"

"Why should I?" he would answer. "Are you trying to force me to go out with Solange? It's quite possible for me to live two or three days without seeing her, you know."

Poor Philippe! No, he could not live two or three days without seeing her. Without knowing exactly why, and without knowing anything of Solange's private life, I felt there had been a change in their relations since she had returned from Morocco, and that this was the source of Philippe's unhappiness.

I did not dare question him about it, but I could follow the inroads this emotional illness was making upon his happiness by observing his face and his expression. Within a few weeks he had lost a great deal of weight, his complexion had grown sallow and his eyes weary. He complained of sleeplessness, and he had the sort of stare that one sees so frequently in people who sleep little. At the table, he was generally silent and one could see he made an effort every time

he spoke. The effort hurt me more than his silence.

Renée came to see me and brought a little dress for the baby. I saw at once that there had been some radical change in her life. She had organized her work, and spoke to me of Dr. Gaulin in such a way that I felt she was in love with him. I had heard it discussed at Gandumas, but the family denied it. They were anxious to remain on friendly terms with Renée, and their code of morality would have demanded that they break with her if her virtue were questioned in the slightest manner. But when I saw her I knew that, consciously or unconsciously, the Marcenats were mistaken. Radiant, Renée looked like a woman who loved and was loved.

I had been alienated from her since my marriage, and on several occasions had found her hard, nearly hostile, but that day we returned, almost immediately, to the old friendly basis; our conversation was pitched in the same key as it used to be when we had the long talks of war days. We spoke of Philippe quite intimately. It was then that Renée told me for the first time, and with great frankness, that she had been in love with him, and that my marriage had been a severe blow.

"I almost hated you at that time, Isabelle; then I planned my life differently, and now, when I think of it, it seems like another life. Don't you think even our most powerful emotions die after a while? And when

we look back on the woman we were only three years ago, we do so with the curiosity and indifference we would display toward a stranger."

"Possibly so, but I have not reached that point yet—I love Philippe just as much as I loved him when we were first married, and a great deal more. I feel capable of sacrifices which I could not possibly have made six months ago."

She looked at me for a while without speaking, and then with a sort of doctor look said,

"Yes, I believe it. . . . Shall I tell you something? Isabelle, I told you just now that I have no regret, but it is more than that; to be quite truthful I may say I congratulate myself every day that I did not marry Philippe."

"And I congratulate myself that I did marry him."

"I know you do, because you love him and you have acquired, as he has, the detestable habit of seeking happiness in pain. But Philippe is a terrible human being, not wicked; on the contrary. But terrible because he is obsessed. I knew him as a child. He was the same then as he is now with this difference: there were other Philippes latent in him. Then Odile came and fixed, doubtless forever, his lover-personality. Love, for him, is associated with a certain kind of face, a certain recklessness of conduct, a certain mysterious charm . . . and as he is at the same time extremely sensitive, this kind of woman which is the only one he can love makes him dreadfully unhappy. . . . Am I wrong?"

"In a way you are, and in another way you are not. I know how absurd it is to say 'he loves me,' and yet he does love me, there's no doubt about it. But you are quite right when you say that he needs women entirely different from me . . . Odile's type, Solange. . . . Do you know Solange Villier, by the way?"

"Very well. . . . I did not dare mention her name to you but it was she I had in mind all the time."

"You may speak of her as openly as you wish. I am no longer jealous of her. I have been. . . . Do people say that she is Philippe's mistress?"

"Not at all. . . . What they do say is that when she was in Morocco the last time, she fell in love with Robert Etienne. He is the man, you know, who wrote that fascinating book on the natives. . . . The last two weeks in Marrakech they were constantly together. He has just come back to Paris. He is not only a great writer but a delightful human being. Gaulin, who knows him well, likes him a lot."

I was silent, while fugitive thoughts passed through my mind. It was just as I had guessed; this mention of Etienne explained certain things that Philippe had said, quite clearly. . . . He had bought, one after another, all his books, and he had read part of them aloud to me, and asked me what I thought of them. I liked them, particularly the long meditation entitled, *Prayer in the Garden of Oudaias.* "It is beautiful," Philippe had said, "it is really gloriously beautiful." Poor Philippe! How he must suffer! Doubtless, he was

now studying the words and actions of Solange as he had once studied those of Odile, ceaselessly seeking traces of the other man. That was the idle and torturing work that occupied his sleepless nights. Suddenly, I felt a surge of anger rise up within me against this woman.

"Renée, it's very true what you said a while ago about this ghastly habit of seeking pleasure in pain. Only when circumstances have forced one to begin one's sentimental life in that way, as in Philippe's case, and in mine, how can one change?"

"One can always change if the desire is there and sufficiently keen."

"But how to awaken the desire unless one has already changed?"

"Gaulin would answer that by saying, 'You must study your mechanism and dominate it . . .' which means, be more intelligent."

"But Philippe is intelligent."

"Yes, I know he is, very intelligent, but he makes too much use of his emotions, too little of his mind."

We talked along in this cheerful vein until Philippe came home. Renée had a scientific way of talking about things which quieted me, for it made me an individual like many others and put me in a class with other labeled lovers. Philippe seemed glad to see Renée; he asked her to dine with us, and for the first time in weeks he spoke with some animation during the

meal. He was interested in science, and Renée told him about new experiments of which he had not heard. The second time she mentioned Gaulin's name, Philippe said abruptly,

"Gaulin? Do you know him well?"

"Rather, he is my boss."

"Isn't he a friend of Robert Etienne, the Morocco Etienne, you know, who wrote that *Prayer in the Garden of Oudaias?*"

"He is indeed."

"And you know him too?"

"Very well."

"What sort of man is he?"

"A very remarkable one."

"Really?" Then he added reluctantly, "I think myself he has great talent, but it happens so frequently that a man is inferior to his work."

"Not in this case, I assure you," Renée said pitilessly.

I looked at her imploringly, and Philippe did not say another word during the remainder of the evening.

21.

I saw Philippe's love for Solange die under my eyes. He never spoke of her to me. On the contrary, he evidently wished me to think there had been no change in their relations. He still saw her quite often, but much less frequently than he had, and he no longer enjoyed it as before. Instead of returning from their walks

together rejuvenated and happy, he was sad and at times despairing. Now and then, I thought he was going to take me into his confidence. He would take my hand and say,

"Isabelle, you have chosen the best part."

"Why, dearest? . . ."

"Because . . . "

Then he would stop, but I understood. He continued sending flowers to Solange, treating her like a much beloved woman. Don Quixote and Lancelot remained faithful. But the notes I found among his papers about that year 1923 are heartbreaking.

*April 17. Walked through Montmartre with S. We climbed to the place du Tertre and sat on the terrace of a café. We had rolls and lemonade. Solange asks for a chocolate bar and enjoys it in the street, like a little girl. I experienced feelings I had forgotten since the Odile-François episode. Solange wants to be affectionate, of course; she is very sweet to me and kind. But I can see that her thoughts are with another. She is lackadaisical as Odile was after her first escapade and avoids, as she did, all explanation. As soon as I speak of her, of us, she switches the conversation and invents a game. To-day she looked at the passers-by and tried to guess what their lives could be. She made up a love story about a taxicab driver who stopped near us and sat at a table with two women whom he had driven in his car. I try to stop loving*

*her but I can't do it. I find her as attractive as ever. I love her healthy look and tanned skin.*

*"Dear, you look sad," she said. "What is the matter? Don't you find life amusing? Just think, in every one of these little houses there are men and women whose lives would be fascinating to watch. And, in Paris, there are hundreds of such places, and scores of Parises in the world. Isn't it wonderful?"*

*"I don't think it is, Solange. Life is curious enough when one is very young. When one has reached forty, as I have, and unmasked the prompter behind the stage, the private life of the actors, and the strings that work the show, one is ready to quit."*

*"I hate to hear you speak that way. You've seen nothing."*

*"I am sorry, Solange dear, but I have seen the third act. It's neither very good nor very exciting; it's the same thing over and over again, and I know it will be the same until the end; I have had enough of it. I have no desire to see the end."*

*"You aren't a responsive audience. You have a charming wife, delightful friends. . . ."*

*"Women friends, you mean?"*

*"Yes, sir, women friends, I know your life. . . ."*

*All this was terribly like Odile. The thing I can't forgive myself is that I wallow in this sadness. There is a mysterious pleasure in thus dominating life as though it were a sad show; a vain pleasure, undoubtedly, but quite in the Marcenat tradition. What*

*I should do is to stop seeing Solange. Then, possibly, I should find appeasement, but to see her without loving her is beyond me.*

*April 18. Last night I had a long talk on love with a friend, a man about fifty, who has the reputation of having been a Don Juan in his time. What struck me, as we were speaking, was that he seems to have got so little happiness from so many conquests which others envied him.*

*"To tell you the truth, I have loved only one woman in my life, Claire P., and how tired I got of her toward the last. . . ."*

*"She is charming, though."*

*"You can't begin to judge her now. She is artificial, a poser; a manner which was natural to her years ago is now a mask. I won't even see her."*

*"What about the others?"*

*"The others, they meant nothing."*

*I mentioned the name of the woman who, even to-day, seems to absorb his life.*

*"I don't love her a bit. It's a habit, really. She has tortured me, been unfaithful to me, and now I can judge her; no, really, she does not mean anything to me."*

*I was wondering, while he talked, if there is such a thing as romantic love, and if it were not better to give it up. Its very condemnation is that death alone saves it from failure. (Tristan)*

*April 19. I went to Gandumas. The first time in*

*three months. A few of the workmen came to burden me with their troubles; poverty, illness. Confronted with these real miseries, I blushed at mine. And yet, there are tragedies of love in that class too.*

*I spent a sleepless night, retrospecting and introspecting. I believe my life has been one long mistake. In reality, all I have ever done has been to pursue an absolute happiness which I thought I could attain through women—and there is no more idle pursuit. Absolute love is no more possible than perfect government, and to take love as it comes is wisest. What we must particularly avoid is to take root in one attitude because it seems satisfactory. Too often our sentiments are none other than reflections of our attitudes. I could rid myself instantly of the obsession of Solange were I willing to look at the real image of her drawn by a cruel and relentless master, the day I first met her, and which I have always retained, but refuse to look at.*

*April 20. Although Solange has lost interest in me, as soon as I try to wrench myself free, she pulls me back and draws the bond closer. Is it coquetry or mercy that prompts her?*

*April 23. Whose fault was it? Solange evolved as Odile did. Was it because I made the same mistakes, or was it because I made the same choice? Should one always hide one's feelings in order to keep one's love? Should one plot and pretend or should one just tie himself. I don't know.*

*April 27. Every ten years one should efface from*

*his mind those ideas that experience has shown to be false.*

*The ideas that I should efface are:*

*(a) That women can be bound by a promise or an oath. They cannot. "Women have no moral sense; their conduct is dependent upon the thing they love."*

*(b) That there is a perfect woman, with whom love might be a succession of joys, without confusing senses, spirit and heart. That is not true. Two human beings, anchored side by side, are like two vessels rocked by the same waves; their hulls meet and groan.*

*April 28. Dined at avenue Marceau. Aunt Cora dying between her pullets and her orchids. Hélène spoke of Solange to me:*

*"Poor Marcenat! What a ghastly air you have had these last few weeks. . . . I know, of course . . . you are wretched."*

*"I don't know what you mean."*

*"Of course you do . . . you know you still love her."*

*I denied it.*

22.

The red notebook reveals to me that Philippe was more lucid and master of himself at that time than he appeared to be. I believe that at that period his mind was already freer, though in his heart an enslaved Philippe hid himself. He seemed so unhappy that many times I asked myself: "Should I not go to Solange and beg her to try to do something?" But the

step seemed so mad that I didn't dare take it.' Moreover, I had such a hatred of Solange that I feared I should not be able to control myself in her presence. We continued to meet her at the Thianges', but Philippe refused (a thing he had never done) to go any more to Hélène's Saturdays.

"You go, just to show that we are not angry with her. It is only right. Hélène is so nice. As for me, I assure you I can't do it; the older I grow the more I detest society . . . my own hearth, a book and you, that is all my happiness demands now."

I knew he meant what he said. I knew also that if at that moment a young, pretty, gay girl crossed his path and gave him, by a scarcely perceptible look, the signal for which he was waiting, he would have immediately and without knowing it changed his philosophy, and explained that after a long day of work he had absolute need of new people and diversion. Early in our married life, I remember being distressed by the idea that the thoughts of those we love are hidden from us within eternally closed heads. Philippe's head had become transparent for me. Through a thin membrane, in which a network of delicate vessels were beating, I could see his every thought, all his weaknesses, and I loved him more than ever. I remember looking at him a long time in silence one evening after he had returned from his office.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked, smiling.

"I am trying to see you as I would see you if I did not love you, and to love you as you would be then."

"How complicated it all is . . . can you find your way through all that maze?"

"My way to loving you? Yes, and without effort."

That evening, he suggested that we go to Gandumas earlier than we had ever gone.

"There is nothing to keep us here. I can look after business there as well as in Paris. The country air will be good for Alain, and mother won't be so much alone. Altogether it seems the thing to do."

It was exactly what I wanted to do. Philippe would be all mine at Gandumas. My only fear was that he might grow bored, but he did not. On the contrary, he became his old self almost immediately. In Paris, though he had lost Solange, there remained a tenacious hope, idle as it probably was. He made an instinctive move every time the telephone rang, one that I knew well and which was beyond control.

When we went out, I who felt keenly all Philippe's reactions and vibrations, knew that he feared he might meet Solange, and yet wished he might. He realized how profoundly he was still obsessed by her, and he knew too that had she wished, she could have got him back immediately. But he also knew that both his dignity and concern for his own happiness demanded that he should not let himself be taken again. At Gandumas, a place with which Solange had never been associated, he began slowly to forget. After a week,

he looked better; his cheeks were fuller, his eyes clearer and he slept better.

The weather was ideal. We took long walks. Philippe told me he wanted to do as his father had done, take an interest in farms. Every day we went to Guichardie, to Bruyères and to Resonzac.

He went to the mill in the morning only; every afternoon he went out with me.

"Do you know what we will do?" he said. "Let's take a book and read aloud, in the woods."

Gandumas was surrounded by shady groves. Sometimes we sat on the moss, beside a wide path above which the branches of the trees met like the aisle of a light green cathedral, sometimes on the trunk of a tree, sometimes on one of the benches that Grandfather Marcenat had placed here and there. Philippe liked the two *Studies of Women*, *The Secrets of Princess de Cadigan*, many of Mérimée's short stories like the *Double Mistake*, or the *Etruscan Vase*, and most of Kipling. We read poetry also. Occasionally, he would look at me and say,

"I'm not boring you, am I?"

"What an idea! I've never been happier."

He would continue to look at me for a moment, then go on reading. When the story was ended, we would discuss the characters, their behavior and personality, and oftentimes the conversation turned to real people. One day, it was I who brought a little book, the name of which I would not let Philippe see.

"What is this mysterious book?" he said after we had settled ourselves.

"It's a book I found in your mother's bookcase and which has played a part in your life, Philippe. At least, you wrote me that it did."

"I know what it is, my *Little Russian Soldiers*. I am so glad you found it, Isabelle. Give it to me, will you?"

He turned the pages, a little amused, a little disappointed, then read,

*"They decided to elect a queen, a young college girl whom we all knew well, Ania Sokoloff. She was a young girl, strikingly beautiful, slender, handsome and clever. . . . Bowing our heads before the queen, we took an oath to obey the laws."*

"It is really charming, Philippe, and so much like you. 'Bowing our heads before the queen, we took an oath to obey the laws.' There is another pretty story in it; there was something the queen wanted and the hero strove mightily to get it. Wait, give me the book.

*" 'Bless me,' said the queen, 'how much trouble you have taken. Thank you.' She was happy, and shaking my hand anew as I said good-by to her, she added, 'If I remain your queen always, I shall instruct*

*the general to reward you particularly.' Profoundly happy I saluted."*

"Philippe, you have been that little boy all your life . . . only there has been frequent change of queen."

Philippe, sitting beneath a bush, broke off little twigs, crushed them in his fingers and threw them on the grass.

"Yes, there have been many queens but the truth is that I never really met the queen . . . that is, not quite, you understand."

"Who has been your queen, Philippe?"

"Many women, dearest. Denise Aubry was one . . . but a very imperfect one. Have I told you she died only a few days ago, poor Denise?"

"No, you did not. She must have been very young. Of what did she die?"

"That I don't know; mother only just told me. To hear as if it were a piece of unimportant news of the death of a woman who for many years was the center of my world had a queer effect upon me!"

"Who was queen after Denise Aubry?"

"Odile."

"She surely was nearest to the queen of your dream."

"Yes, because she was so beautiful."

"After Odile? . . . Hélène de Thianges a little?"

"Possibly a little, but surely you, Isabelle."

"Was I, really? For how long?"

"Oh, a long time."

"And then Solange?"

"Yes, then Solange. . . ."

"Is Solange still queen, Philippe?"

"No, but despite all, the memory I have of Solange is not disagreeable or painful. There was something so vital and powerful about her. She made me feel younger; I liked it."

"You'll have to see her again, Philippe."

"Yes, when I am entirely cured I shall see her. But she will no longer be queen. That's over."

"And now, Philippe, who is queen?"

He hesitated a moment, then looking at me, said,

"You are."

"I? But I was dethroned a long time ago."

"Perhaps you were, because you were jealous, despicable, unjust. But you have been so courageous and so simple the last three months that I have given you back your crown. And then, Isabelle, you have no idea how much you have changed; you are no longer the same person."

"I know it very well, dearest. In reality, a woman who is truly in love has no personality; she says she has and she tries to make herself believe it, but it is not true. She tries to understand the woman whom the man she loves wishes to find in her, and to become that woman. With you, Philippe, it is very difficult because it is not easy to know what you want; you need fidelity

and love, but you also need coquetry and something to worry about. What can one do? I chose the rôle of fidelity, it was truest to my nature. . . . But I believe that for a long time to come you will need some one else around you, less constant, more elusive. The great victory that I have won over myself was that I accepted the other, and I did so with resignation, possibly even with joy. The important thing I have learned during the past year is that if one truly loves, it is not really necessary to attach great importance to the actions of those we love. We need them; only through them can we live in a certain 'atmosphere.' (Your friend Hélène calls it 'climate' and she is right.) And it is in an atmosphere without which we cannot live. So long as we have it and keep it, what does the rest matter? Life is so short and so difficult. . . . Have I the heart to begrudge you the few hours of happiness that all these women give you, my poor Philippe? I have not. I have gone beyond that. I am not jealous any more. I don't suffer any more."

Philippe, stretching himself upon the grass and putting his head in my lap, said,

"I have not quite reached that point yet. I still have the capacity to suffer, and to suffer terribly. There is no consolation for me in the thought of life's brevity. It is brief, of course, but brief compared to what? For us, it is everything. But just the same I feel that I am entering slowly into a calmer zone. You remember, Isabelle, that I used to compare my life to a sym-

phony, in which were blended many themes; the knight-errant, the cynic, the rival. I still hear them all and sometimes very loudly. But now in that orchestra I hear also a single instrument, I don't know which one, which plays over and over, distinctly but softly, a theme of tender and soothing notes. It is the theme of serenity; it resembles that of old age."

"But you are very young, Philippe."

"Yes, I know it, that's why the theme seems very sweet to me. Later, the entire orchestra will play it and I shall regret the time when I heard the others."

"Do you know, Philippe, the thing that often saddens me is to think that the apprenticeship is so long. You tell me that I am more to you now than I ever was and I believe it is true. When I am forty, perhaps, I shall begin to understand life a little . . . but then it will be too late. . . . Do you think it possible for two beings to be in perfect communion, to have a sky without a cloud?"

"It has just been possible for a whole hour," he said, getting up.

23.

The happiest time of my married life was that summer at Gandumas. I believe there were two periods when Philippe was in love with me; a few weeks before our marriage, and from June to September of that last summer. He was kind, simple, thoughtful. His mother had insisted that we share the same room; she was

determined that we should because she could not understand why husband and wife should ever be separated. This had brought us closer still to one another. I loved to awaken in Philippe's arms. Alain would come to play in our bed. He was teething, but he stood the ordeal courageously. When he cried, Philippe would say to him, "You must smile, Alain; you have a stoic mother, my boy." I believe that the little fellow came to understand what these two words, "smile, Alain" meant, because he frequently made an effort to stop crying and open his little mouth to try to look happy. It was delightful and Philippe began to love his son.

The weather was perfect. When my husband came back from the mill, he loved to "bake" in the sun. We would put two chairs on the lawn in front of the house and sit there silent, lost in vague revery. I liked to think that the same images might rise in both our minds; the briar heath, the ruins of the Castle of Chardeuil which seemed to waver in the heated atmosphere; the shadowy outline of the distant hills, and still farther away the face of Solange perhaps, and the harsh expression of her beautiful eyes; on the horizon, perchance a Florentine landscape, the huge, slightly sloping roofs, the domes of the churches, cypresses on the hills instead of fir trees, and the angelic face of Odile. Odile and Solange were also in my reveries, and I found it natural and necessary. Sometimes, Philippe would look at me and smile. I knew that we were in

perfect communion; I was happy. The dinner bell would arouse us from this delightful languor.

And with a sigh I would say,

"Ah, Philippe, I wish I could spend my whole life near you, like this, free of all contact with the world save your hand, the warmth of the air, and these briar heaths around us. . . . It is delightful with a touch of melancholy, don't you find it so? I wonder why it is so?"

"The most precious moments are always tinged with melancholy for one feels how fleeting they are; one wishes to keep them and cannot. When I was a little boy, I always had that feeling at the circus; later, at concerts. Whenever I was happiest, I would say to myself, 'In two hours it will all be over.'"

"But now, Philippe, we have at least thirty years ahead of us."

"Thirty years? That is very short."

"I don't ask for more."

My mother-in-law also seemed to hear this pure and charming note in our happiness.

"At last," she said to me one evening, "I see Philippe living as I always wished he would live. Do you know, Isabelle, dear, what you would try to do if you were prudent? You would try to make Philippe come back to Gandumas for good. Paris is no place for him. Philippe is like his father who was, fundamentally, timid and sensitive, despite his self-contained air. The

complexities and obligations of Paris life make him ill."

"Yes, mother, that's true, but unfortunately he might be bored here."

"I don't believe it. His father and I lived here for sixteen years, and they were the best of our lives. . . ."

"Most likely they were, but he has become accustomed to other things. I know that I should be much happier here, because I love to live alone, but he . . ."

"He'd have you."

"That would not suffice forever."

"You are too modest, my dear, and you have no confidence in yourself. Don't give in so easily."

"I am not giving in, mother, on the contrary. I am convinced I shall win; I shall be here when the others have gone out of his life and left no trace upon it."

"The others!" she said, with astonishment. "Surely this resignation is a sign of weakness."

She recurred to her plan constantly; she was gentle but tenacious. But I avoided speaking to Philippe about it. I knew that such constraint would destroy the perfect harmony we now enjoyed. Instead, I suggested several times that he spend Sundays with neighbors or that we make little trips into Périgord or Limousin, of which he had spoken to me but which I scarcely knew. I was so afraid he might become bored. I loved to see his native province with him; I loved this rugged country with its steep cliffs and its castles with enormous walls from which one had such gorgeous

views over rivers and forests. Philippe told me the legends and the anecdotes of that region. I, who had been so interested in history, heard with a thrill of joy the names Hautefort, Biron, Brantôme. Sometimes, timidly, I connected the story he told me with something I had read, and it was delightful to see the interest with which he listened.

"What a lot of things you know, Isabelle! You are very intelligent, more so perhaps than any woman I know."

"Don't make fun of me, Philippe."

I had the feeling that I was at last discovered by a lover, whom I had loved hopelessly for a long time.

24.

Philippe said he wanted to show me the grotto of the Vézère Valley. I loved the bleak river flowing between the rocks, polished and hollowed by the water, but the grottos disappointed me. In prostrating heat, we had to climb stiff little paths, then go through narrow tunnels of rocks, just for the sake of looking at shadowy outlines of wild oxen sketched in red on the walls.

"Can you see anything? It is a bison, if you insist, but it is upside down, I think."

"I can't see anything and I want to get away. I am freezing."

After the heat of the climb, I too had felt a sudden

chill when we entered the cavern. On the way home he was silent; that night he said he thought he had a cold and the next morning he woke me up early.

"I feel quite ill," he said.

I got up hurriedly and pushed back the curtains. When I saw his face I was frightened; he was pale and seemed to be suffering. There were heavy, dark rings around his eyes and the wings of his nostrils were moving laboriously.

"You look ill; you must have caught cold yesterday."

"I can't breathe and I know I have a fever. It won't be anything, dear. Give me some aspirin, will you?"

He would not see a physician and I hated to force him to see one, but when his mother, whom I called, came into our room at about nine, she insisted that she take his temperature. She treated him with an authority which astonished me, as one treats a sick little boy. Despite his objections, she had Dr. Toury come from Chardeuil. He was timid, soft-spoken, and looked at you long through his tortoise-shell glasses before speaking. He listened carefully to Philippe's chest.

"Rather a severe bronchitis, Monsieur Marcenat. You'll be in bed at least a week."

He motioned to me to come out with him; he looked at me from behind his glasses, kindly, ill at ease.

"To tell you the truth, Madame, it's quite serious. Your husband has broncho-pneumonia. When I lis-

tened to his chest I heard râles throughout the entire chest, almost as deep as in a pulmonary edema. He has a temperature of one hundred and four and his pulse is one hundred and forty. It's a bad case of pneumonia."

I felt half-frozen; I could scarcely grasp what he said.

"But he is not in danger, is he, doctor?" I said half-seriously, so incredible did it seem that my robust Philippe of the day before could be profoundly ill. The doctor looked astonished.

"Pneumonia is always dangerous; time only will tell."

Then he told me what to do.

I remember scarcely anything of the days that followed; I had been thrown abruptly into the mysterious, cloistered life of illness. I nursed Philippe, doing as much as I could, because I had the feeling that by doing something I could drive away the ghastly and terrible enemy that was assailing him. When I could not do anything, I sat by his side, in a white blouse, looking at him, trying to infuse into him, through my eyes, some of my strength.

The first two days he knew me but he was so prostrated that he could not speak. His eyes thanked me. Then he went into delirium. The third day was most trying. He thought I was Solange. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, he began to talk to me, with great difficulty.

"I knew you would come, Solange dear; it was kind of you."

He had difficulty enunciating words, but he looked at me with profound tenderness.

"Kiss me, Solange," he whispered, "you can do it without fear, I am so ill."

Without knowing what I was doing, I bent over him and he kissed Solange on my lips.

With what joy would I have given Solange to you, Philippe, if I had believed her love could have saved you! I believe that if I ever loved you perfectly, it was at that very moment, because I had abdicated. I lived only for you. During the period of delirium, my mother-in-law was often with us when he spoke of Solange; not once did I experience a feeling of revolt, of wounded pride. All I thought was "Merciful God, let him live, let him live."

On the fifth day, I regained some hope; his temperature was lower that morning, but when the doctor came and I said to him, "At last, he is improving; his temperature is only one hundred," I saw that he did not share my hope. He examined Philippe, who was then almost unconscious. When he finished, I said, timidly, "Isn't he better?" He sighed and looked at me sadly.

"No, on the contrary; I don't like those sudden drops of temperature. It is a false crisis. . . . Bad sign."

"But not a sign of death, is it?"

He did not answer.

Toward evening his temperature went up again and his features changed profoundly. I knew then he was going to die. Sitting by his side, I took his burning hand in mine; he seemed not to feel it. I thought, "So you are going to leave me alone, my love." And I tried to imagine this inconceivable thing; life without Philippe. Great God, how could I ever have been jealous of him . . . with only a few months to live, and . . . I made, then, an oath that if by some miracle Philippe were saved I should never strive for any happiness save his.

At midnight his mother came to take my place. I made a sign with my head that I did not want her to relieve me. I was still holding Philippe's hand in mine, and a clammy perspiration was beginning to cover it. His labored breathing was painful to hear. Suddenly, he opened his eyes and said,

"Isabelle, I am choking, I think I am going to die."

He said these few words in a clear voice, then fell back into a stupor. His mother took me by the shoulders and kissed me. The pulse which I was holding became faint. At six that morning the doctor came and gave him an injection which revived him a little. At seven, he breathed his last without having come out of the coma. His mother closed his eyes. I thought of a sentence he had written, at the time of his father's death, "Shall I be alone, some day, with death? I hope it will be soon."

It had been soon, Philippe, just as you had wished and it was a great pity, my dear love. Had I been able to keep you I believe I could have made you happy. But our destinies and our desires rarely play in unison.

(5)

THE END

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